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Annan visit

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is expected to meet with President Hosni Mubarak today. He arrives in Cairo from Amman, where, on Tuesday, he said he had no particular package in mind to resolve the current deadlock in the peace process.

"It is, of course, the United States that plays the role of mediator and we support them," said Annan.

Israel rapped

FOREIGN ministers of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) ended their meeting in Doha, Qatar, on Tuesday, urging members to cut ties with Israel. A statement condemned Israel for undermining the Middle East peace process, AFP reported, and called on the international community to avoid dealing with the Israeli occupation authorities.

The US and Russia were requested to pressure Israel into complying with international law and ending its colonial policy. Qatar's Foreign Minister said after the session that Qatar might close Israel's trade mission in Doha.

Turning to Iraq, the OIC called on Baghdad to cooperate closely with UN disarmament experts and also reaffirmed its commitment to Iraq's sovereignty and its solidarity with the Iraqi people. The ministers called for the UN Security Council to suspend its sanctions against Libya and for the international community to help halt human rights violations in Kosovo.

Strong backing

THE UN General Assembly strongly backed a resolution reiterating a November decision calling for a full meeting of the parties to the 1949 Geneva Convention that bans the usurping of land by an occupying power, a provision that would make Israeli settlement building illegal. The non-binding Arab and EU-backed resolution was passed during an emergency session with 120 in favour and three — US, Israel and Micronesia — against, with five abstentions.

US Ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson criticised the resolution for ignoring a Swiss compromise under which Palestinian and Israeli experts could discuss the issues under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross.



photo: Yves Paris

A lease of life for Fatimid Cairo

THE RICHLY adorned tomb chamber of the Mausoleum of Kalaoun, left, is one of the most celebrated buildings of Fatimid Cairo, the preservation of which has aroused interest at the highest level. President Hosni Mubarak met twice in less than a week with a ministerial group charged with the restoration of Fatimid Cairo. At the second meeting on Tuesday, Mubarak and the group decided to build a two-way motorists' tunnel below Al-Azhar Street to relieve traffic congestion in the area.

The tunnel, according to Transport Minister Suleiman Metwalli, will serve as an alternative to Al-Azhar Bridge, connecting Salah Salem Street with Ataba and Opera squares. The first phase will be completed in one year, the second a year later, after which the bridge will be removed. The preservation plan for Fatimid Cairo is based on an 11-chapter report prepared by the UN Development Programme and the Supreme Council of Antiquities [SCA] which recommends massive restoration of buildings and streets from Bab El-Fetouh to Bab Zewaila in an attempt to revive their "Islamic setting."

"The urgency of the situation and the great value attached by Egypt and the international community to Fatimid Cairo required the attention of the highest level of government to initiate and sustain a sound policy of restoration," Culture Minister Farouk Hosni told **Omayma Abdel-Latif**, adding that this decisive move by the political leadership will encourage the world community to participate technically and financially on a large scale.

According to Gaballah Ali Gaballah, SCA secretary-general, the report is the only comprehensive in-depth study on the area's restoration. Gaballah, who participated in the high-level meetings, said the report was presented, along with other documents and an atlas of statistics, to the president to be considered for immediate action to preserve Cairo's Islamic heritage. *(see p.14)*

'Double the pressure'

Netanyahu refuses any European role in peace-making after snubbing British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook

Amid a scrum of Israeli border police and under a swirling rainstorm, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook on Tuesday made good his promise to visit Jebel Abu-Ghneim, provoking an angry showdown with Binyamin Netanyahu, who insisted that Israel would go ahead with the construction of thousands of homes on contested land in East Jerusalem.

In the aftermath of Cook's visit, Netanyahu cancelled a planned dinner to protest his meeting with a Palestinian official at Jebel Abu-Ghneim, site of the disputed Har Homa housing project. A joint news conference and even the traditional handshake were called off.

"The issue of Jerusalem is a cardinal one in our eyes and it is important for us to inform any guest in Jerusalem and anyone who wants to contribute to the peace process that Israel is sovereign in Jerusalem and will remain so," a grim-faced Netanyahu told reporters.

"This government is the one that decided to go forward with the building of Har Homa. And Har Homa will be built. There will be thousands of homes in Har Homa."

The storm and general chaos surrounding the foreign secretary made a fitting image for the current state of the Oslo peace process and European Union [EU] efforts to revive it.

Avoiding counter-demonstrations by Israel's anti-settlement Peace Now and pro-settlement Women in Green movements, Cook drove to an unscheduled location at the foot of the mountain. There — hemmed around by Israeli police and viciously abused by the Women in Green protesters — he met with Palestinian Legislative Council member for Bethlehem, Salah Tamari. It was a gesture of solidarity the Palestinian clearly appreciated. "The fact that Mr Cook did not back down in the face of Israeli pressure shows that he is a courageous man," said Tamari. "In coming to [Jebel Abu-Ghneim], he put his finger on the main issue in the conflict between us and Israel — which is the issue of land confiscation and settlements."

Netanyahu's tough stance comes at a time when both the United States and Europe are expected to press initiatives for breaking the deadlock. Cook said Tuesday that the European and American positions that Israeli settlement expansion must stop were "absolutely identical."

But after angrily rejecting the European initiative to end the stalemate in talks with the Palestinians, Israel sought yesterday to prevent the United States from going public with its ideas for reviving Middle East peace-making.

Netanyahu sent two senior envoys to Washington to convey the message that a public push by the US to force concessions from Israel would not work, Israel radio and television reported. The envoys, Netanyahu's diplomatic adviser Uzi Arad and Trade and Industry Minister Nathan Sharansky, left Tuesday for Washington.

The prime minister's curt treatment of Cook appeared to be a signal to Washington that he will not be pressured into making concessions.

The European plan, endorsed at an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers on Sunday, stresses that both sides must honour signed agreements between them and that the Palestinian Authority [PA] must make a "100 per cent effort on [Israel's] security." But it specifically calls on Israel to make "substantial, credible and urgent" redeployments in the West Bank and to "halt all expansion of settlements" in the Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem.

After causing the diplomatic fracas in Israel, Cook, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the EU, arrived in Damascus yesterday and was greeted by calls for a strong European role in peace-making. Meanwhile Netanyahu's adviser David Bar-Illan was announcing that Cook's "provocative" actions in Jerusalem had disqualified the EU as a Middle East mediator.

Cook had begun his Middle East tour in Cairo by meeting with President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa on Monday. The European plan was praised by Moussa as reflecting "a clarity of perspective to a great extent" on the disputed issues.

Azmi Bishara, an Arab-Israeli member of the Knesset, who met with Moussa on Tuesday, said Netanyahu is not interested in any European initiative. "The European ideas include a freeze on settlements which is against the very *raison d'être* of this government. It will not freeze settlements, but will continue to build," Bishara said.

The United States, for its part, has been talking about ideas for breaking the stalemate with both parties for the past few months on an informal basis.

Palestinian Minister of Planning Nabil Shaath said in Gaza that the American proposals were expected to be handed over to Israel and the Palestinians before 23 March, when President Bill Clinton is scheduled to begin an African tour. But Shaath quickly added that there is a possibility that the Americans, fearing Israeli protests, may not present their proposals.

"The Israelis are doing their best not to let the Americans present their initiative," Shaath told a visiting group of Cairo-based foreign correspondents. "They prefer to see the Americans as dedicated allies and not as mediators."

But Cook saw matters differently. "We do believe that we are more likely to get a positive response from Mr Netanyahu if he is aware that the United States and Europe speak together; double the pressure," he said.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, after meeting with Cook in Gaza on Tuesday, said he was confident that Netanyahu would eventually give in to international pressure.

Arafat affirmed his pledge to declare an independent Palestinian state by January 1999, despite Israeli objections. "Definitely, this will happen. That is the end of the interim agreement we signed with Israel and the last phase of Oslo," Arafat told the visiting foreign correspondents. *(see p.4)*

***Dina Ezzat** in Cairo,*
***Khaled Dawoud** in Gaza,*
***Graham Usher** in Jerusalem*
and wire dispatches

INSIDE

Legless in Alex

A flock of French journalists flew in to the Qait Bey Fort last week in the hope of seeing an old man reunited with his legs — but in vain. **Hala Halim** was on hand to pick up the pieces

Khamasin sandstorms and wild waters put paid last week to a submarine search for a pair of Ptolemaic legs. The granite legs in question, part of a male colossus thought to depict one of the Ptolemies, are submerged in the waters behind Qait Bey Fort, site of the Pharos Lighthouse. Other portions of the colossus have been brought up in the course of the French-Egyptian excavation, headed by Prof Jean-Yves Empereur of the Centre d'Etudes Alexandrines (CEA), which started in 1994. The immediate impetus to locate the legs is an exhibition to be held at the Petit Palais in Paris in May, where the statue is scheduled to be presented in a state of anatomical completion.

The colossus is thought to have been toppled by one of the succession of earthquakes that undid the ancient Lighthouse of Alexandria. When the torso of the colossus was raised from the site in 1995, "we actually had to slide it out from underneath some concrete blocks," explains spokesperson Colin Clement. These concrete blocks are part of a subsurface breakwater, intended to protect the fort, and commissioned a few years ago by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). The dumping occurred despite the fact that the antiquities authorities were fully aware of the presence of submerged statues and masonry on the site. Media outcry against the dumping of the blocks on top of the antiquities ensued, and the project was abandoned in midstream while the French-Egyptian team were given the go-ahead to excavate — but by then, the damage was done.

In the early '60s, pioneer amateur archaeological diver Kamel Abul-Saadat had explored the site and lobbied the antiquities authorities to have a female colossus raised in 1962. This 12-metre female figure, currently on the lawn of the Maritime Museum, bore a stylistic resemblance to Isis, and was for long considered to be a representation of the goddess. Abul-Saadat also noted the presence of a male colossus nearby, which he sketched in what appears to be an intact condition, though he was to tell Professor of Oceanography Selim Morcos that the head was missing. He also described the colossus as very similar to the statue of Ramses II that stands in the square named after him in Cairo. In her preliminary survey of the site in 1968, British archaeologist Honor Frost, aided by Abul-Saadat, also made sketches of the colossus, but could not determine its gender as it lay face down.

Drawing on the work of Abul-Saadat and Frost, the present team have reinterpreted the two colossal statues, one male, the other female, as a Ptolemaic royal couple. According to Empereur: "we learnt from Honor and her map, which incorporated information given by Abul-Saadat, that the two colossal statues, that of Isis, and that of Ptolemy-Pharaoh, were found side by side and the bases of the two statues were found side by side, hence our conclusion that these statues stood at the foot of the Lighthouse as a sort of royal propaganda on the part of the Ptolemaic kings who wanted to associate their image with the most celebrated monument of the city — the Lighthouse."



courtesy of Prof Selim Morcos

Abul-Saadat's sketch of the colossus

While the torso of the male colossus was being shipped to Marseilles about two weeks ago, the archaeologists busied themselves with removing some 40 concrete blocks from the site in search of the legs. Amid the hustle and bustle of a large group of French journalists who had flown in to witness the spectacle, stood Gilles Chazal, director of the Petit Palais. The plan, explains Chazal, is to erect the Ptolemy-Pharaoh figure in front of the Petit Palais. Inside will be displayed a female bust in granite and a portion of an obelisk from the site, as well as a mosaic depicting a Medusa figure found by the CEA in their downtown Theatre Diana dig. This will be complemented by photos of the underwater excavation and other CEA digs in the city, such as the Gabbari Necropolis excavation.

The strong French association with the Pharos site, it should be added, goes beyond the funding and the nationality of the core team. When French President Jacques Chirac visited the site in the spring of 1996, the head of the Ptolemy-Pharaoh colossus was fished out for his benefit. But is the exhibition part of the calendar of French cultural events initially scheduled to mark Napoleon's expedition to Egypt? Not at all, responds Chazal. "We are holding this exhibition because Alexandria is, on the one hand, a mythical city, and on the other, little known. The exhibition will be held in the context of the year of 'France-Egypt: Shared Horizons'. Bonaparte — let us not speak of him."

Which leaves the question of the legs. Ultimately, Ptolemy-Pharaoh need not stand on his own legs in Paris, but could be furnished with an artificial pair, suggested one source, who asked to remain anonymous. Even if this happens, the search for the legs will have yielded two positive results for Alexandrian archaeology. In return for being allowed to exhibit the artefacts in Paris, explains Chazal, two mosaics, that of the Medusa, and a Hellenistic work showing a dog, discovered in the dig of the site of the future Bibliotheca Alexandrina, will be restored by the French. More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the dubious breakwater has been, in part, removed, giving the archaeologists access to parts of the site that were previously out of bounds. According to Clement, "the removal of the concrete blocks exposed yet more very large pieces of masonry which... appear to be of the same material and... style as those which have been attributed to the Pharos [Lighthouse] itself."

Agreeing to disagree

Ahmed Maher, Egypt's ambassador to Washington, spoke to **Nevine Khalil** about the dynamics of US-Egyptian relations

What is your assessment of the mood in Washington during the recent Iraq crisis and how did this affect Egyptian-US relations?
In order to speak about relations during what you call the Iraq crisis, I think it's appropriate to put them in the right context. We have a very close and broad relationship with the US which is always described as a mature relationship where you can agree and disagree without harming the essence of the relationship. It is a close relationship of cooperation and friendship based on common principles and common goals.

During this crisis we had points of agreement and points of disagreement. The point of agreement is that it is [important] to express the necessity for Iraq to abide by the resolutions of the Security Council. At the same time, we were convinced, and are still convinced, that the use of force would not achieve any useful purpose. The use of force would result in more suffering for the Iraqi people, which is something totally unacceptable.

This was a good example of a relationship where you can agree on some aspects and disagree on others without harming the essence of the relationship.

During the crisis there were consultations on all levels between the US and Egypt. I think they clearly understood our position and the relationship has come out stronger, which proves its maturity, durability and resilience and that it can [survive] through difficult times.

Was Egypt asked at any point to take part in a military strike against Iraq?
No. We made our position clear from the beginning that this is a situation which should be solved diplomatically and politically, and that using force would do more harm than good. This was clear from the first moment. President [Hosni] Mubarak made it very clear [both] publicly and in his contacts with the [US] administration.

There was no reason for them to ask us to participate in such action which we oppose and still oppose.

Do you see any difference in America's policies on the Middle East peace process during President Bill Clinton's first and second terms, in view of the fact that not much progress has been achieved lately?
I think the difference is not in the Clinton administration. What has really happened in the peace process is the advent of a new Israeli government which is legally bound by the Oslo agreements and the *ensuing agreements, but which, deep in* its heart, does not believe in these agreements and thinks they are bad agreements.

The second important point is that this administration under [Secretary of State Madeleine] Albright has been active in a different way from that of [former Secretary of State Warren] Christopher.

Christopher believed in movement for the sake of movement, in the hope that by moving you would create a certain momentum that would eventually lead to solving the problem. Albright is more intent on concentrating on the substance of the matter. She did come out with the four-points agenda. She did meet with the leaders, and the administration is preparing to come out with an American plan.

But the problem is, and has always been, that because of many considerations, the capacity of an American administration to lean heavily on Israel is limited.

At the present moment we find the Likud government in Israel does not enjoy the support of the great majority of the Jewish community in the US. Many have reservations on the policies of [Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu, whether regarding the peace process, or who is a Jew, or the relationship between Israel and the US. But the truth of the matter is that, when Israel clamours that *this is a question of security* and that Israel is in danger, all these differences tend to be minimised. They will turn into pressure on the administration, so as not to, as some of them say, oblige Israel to *take decisions which are contrary* to its security requirements.

Let us not kid ourselves. The US will never side 100 per cent with the Arab position. It is always a question of finding *compromises.*

It is our duty to support the Palestinians in order that any compromises they would be required to make would not be contrary to the principles, aims or goals we want to achieve, [namely] an independent Palestinian state that enjoys freedom on its land, and is thus able to enter into relations with the Israeli state that are based on equality, common interests and cooperation.

We are using our contacts with the US, Israelis and Palestinians in order to promote a just, equitable, durable solution, not only for the Palestinians but also for the Syrians and Lebanese.

What do you expect from the new US proposal which is expected to be announced soon?
This is an American thinking process. We, of course, have an input, but we did not yet get an output from the Americans.

Our input is to impress upon them the realities of the situation, what has to be taken into consideration, the obligations of the Israelis to be faithful to the resolutions of the UN, and the principles on which the American state and democracy are based — the right to self-determination.

Some US officials told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Arab public does not trust the US to achieve a just peace in the Middle East. Do you agree?
Arab public opinion is affected by many American positions. One of them is what is known as double standards [in foreign policy].

If we look at what is happening, not only is Iraq being forced to implement Security Council resolutions at the expense of great suffering of its people, we also see that many Arab countries are under sanctions such as Libya and Sudan. We also see on the 'famous' list of countries supporting so-called terrorism, or not fighting narcotics, that there are many Arab countries. This is something Arab public opinion resents very much.

The second aspect is that whenever the US appears to be siding with the Israelis, of course the frustration of Arab public opinion is great. It's a question of disappointment.

If you create a situation of despair for the people, that a solution is not possible, that the US is not playing the role that is expected of it, then you will have trouble all over the place. This is what we said about trying to use force against Iraq.

Do you agree with the term 'double standards' in US Middle East policy, and how do you deal with it in Washington?
I would not use the expression 'double standards' but I would say that in many cases we feel that the US should be more forceful in some ways and that its actions created the perception of double standards in Arab public opinion.

We all have our prejudices and preferences, but in the political arena, where we are dealing with the only superpower, I think it is our right, and we [exercise] it by demanding of it not to act according to its prejudices and preferences, but according to its principles.

How did Washington receive President Mubarak's statement during the Iraqi crisis that the US was losing credibility in the Middle East?
It angered some people, but it did open the eyes of many others. They trust him as a friend of the US and a man who speaks the truth. Those who wanted to use force [against Iraq] did not appreciate this 'real talk', but those who are serious people who want to consider all points of view were grateful to President Mubarak for having [highlighted] things that they were not aware of.

I believe we came out of this crisis with even greater respect in the US for a leader like President Mubarak, who from the first day came out very clearly and directly, as is his custom, and told them things as they are.

How much progress has Egypt achieved in building a balanced economic relationship with the US, independent of aid?
We know aid is not forever and that there are ways of cooperation which perhaps have been neglected, but it's very important now to activate them. Trade and investment are two fields that are very important for us and we would like to increase cooperation in these sectors. There is also the transfer of technology.

The [Gore-Mubarak] initiative for a US-Egyptian partnership puts economic relationships in a wider context that is not only based on aid, but also trade, development, investment and transfer of technology. In this context, the mix can change without the overall [ingredients] changing. We are building a new house where there are many rooms, and we have finished one floor and are building the second.

We will maintain very solid economic cooperation while the percentage of aid would diminish gradually. *It has to be* slow because at this particular moment, we still need US aid in order to continue building our infrastructure, because we are still at a very important phase of our economic reform programme.

Turning down the volume

The minister of state for environmental affairs, Nadia Makram Ebeid, has ordered the closing — for the second time in two weeks — of the Sindbad amusement park in Heliopolis for exceeding the permissible noise limit, reports **Mahmoud Bakr**



The Sindbad amusement park was first shut down, at the orders of the Minister of State for Environmental Affairs Nadia Makram Ebeid, and sealed with red wax at the beginning of this month. But the owner defiantly removed the seals and reopened the park to visitors.

On Saturday night, Ebeid descended on the park. Visitors were asked to leave, electricity was cut off, the park was turned over to police and management was told that operations would not be resumed until the park's "ecological status" was improved. Otherwise, the park's licence will be revoked.

On Sunday, Ebeid met with the park's owner, Mohamed Said, and later said that Sindbad would not be reopened unless the noise pollution was stopped and until it met other requirements laid down by the Construction Research Centre. Said said he would comply.

The possibility of relocating the park outside Cairo altogether is also under consideration, Ebeid said.

Defending his position, Said said the park — which employs about 500 workers — did a great service to neighbours, by lighting and cleaning the surrounding streets and hiring security guards.

He said that 50 per cent of the requirements demanded by the Construction Research Centre have already been met. A sound-proof wall has been installed, reducing the noise volume to a minimum, shops outside the park's fence were shut down and the gates near inhabited areas were relocated to the Cairo-Ismailia highway.

What remains to be done is to install new staircases, leading from the new gates down to the park itself, the owner said.

Key issue at the Egyptian Museum

FOR TEN DAYS, security officials at the Egyptian Museum have been engaged in a *secret search for four master keys which had* been removed from the museum's main safe. The keys open no less than 200 showcases containing priceless artefacts.

It was only on Monday that museum and *security officials could breathe a sigh of* relief when the lost keys were found in the basement.

Although Ahmed Nawar, head of the museums' department at the Culture Ministry, *conceded that the keys had been missing for* 10 days, he stressed that no thefts had been reported. An investigation has been opened and, according to Nawar, the culprit will be punished.

In a press statement, Nawar said the keys were found to be missing during a routine check of the museum's safe on 5 March. "The museum police were ordered to step up security precautions and the national security *squad responsible for museum surveillance* was kept on full alert," Nawar said.

Gaballah Ali Gaballah, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities [SCA], visited the museum and ordered that the *locks on the 200 showcases be replaced.* "This is only a temporary measure until new electro-mechanical locks are installed," he said.

The keys were lost and found only a few *days before a new security system was to go* into operation to safeguard the museum's treasures. As part of this LE10-million system, tested on Monday, 190 surveillance cameras have been installed in the museum's rooms and corridors.

Giza market problem addressed

Following a three-month hiatus, the Sixth of October wholesale fruit and vegetable market should go into operation within the next few days to serve the governorate of Giza. **Mona El-Nahhas** paid a visit

Ever since its official inauguration by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri last December, the Sixth *of October wholesale fruit and vegetable market* has remained idle. Traders have been reluctant to move there for fear that, due to its location, they might lose their customers. The market, which is seven kilometres from the centre of the Sixth of October City, *is designed to serve the governorate* of Giza. The governorate of Cairo is served by El-Obour market, which opened three years ago along the Ismailia highway.

To force Giza traders to move to the Sixth of *October market, Giza Governor Maher El-*Guindi, on 14 February, prohibited wholesalers from trading outside the new market. They were given a grace period that expired last Saturday. According to Mustafa El-Khatib, head of the mar*ket's executive body, the market will be put into* operation within the coming few days.

Asked about the delay, El-Khatib said: "There *is no delay. The public utilities police have al*ready started shutting down the shops of wholesalers who refuse to move to the new market. Everything will be okay very soon."

A visit to the LE248 million market showed *that, apart from a few traders doing paperwork*, it was nearly empty. The market, which covers over 123,000 square metres, includes 617 shops and stalls for vegetables, fruits and poultry. Each shop was built on 150 square metres while the stalls *are 72 square metres each. The market also in*cludes an executive building, coffee shops, a restaurant, a mosque, banks and 168 units for leftovers. "Sales are expected to reach LE2 billion annually," El-Khatib said.

Traders concede that the market is very well equipped, but complain about their lease contracts which they consider unfair. A shop is *leased for a 25-year-period for LE257,000*, a vegetable stall for LE120,000 and a fruit stall for LE100,000. After the contracts expire, the shops and stalls return to the control of the Giza Governorate, which has the right to allocate them to *other traders.*

"It's unfair to be deprived of the right of ownership after paying all this money," said Mohamed Harbi, a vegetable wholesaler. During the market's inauguration, El-Ganzouri promised to *look into the matter, Harbi said.*

Lease costs may seem exorbitant but merchants point out that they had been reduced by 20 per cent upon El-Ganzouri's orders. A trader has to pay 25 per cent of the cost in advance; the re*maining sum is paid in annual instalments over* periods ranging from five to 25 years, at an annual interest rate of 13 per cent. Traders are de*manding that the interest rate be reduced to six* per cent and also want a tax exemption for two years.

Traders also complain that nearby housing is unavailable. They are ready to build their own *homes, with their own money, if they are pro*vided with land by the Giza Governorate.

El-Khatib said that the executive body "has sent the contracts as well as the demands made by the wholesalers to the legislative department of the *Supreme Administrative Court, the judicial body* in charge of scrutinising contracts signed between the government and citizens. We'll do whatever it recommends concerning the contracts," he said.

As to the interest rate, El-Khatib said it fluctu*ates in line with Central Bank decisions.*

Efforts to stop demolition frenzy

Twelve Giza Governorate officials are being questioned for licencing the demolition of a number of villas and palaces in violation of a government ban. **Gihan Shahine** investigates



One of the demolished villas in the Giza Governorate
photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

On the orders of Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, administrative prosecutors are questioning 12 Giza governorate officials for issuing demolition licences for as many as *29 villas and palaces. The of*ficials are accused of violating a decree by the prime minister that prohibits the demolition of villas and palaces nationwide.

The 19 February decree is designed to preserve the nation's architectural heritage. It provides for punitive measures against any official who issues a villa demolition licence. In cases of villas that have already been razed, the owner is only allowed to build a structure of equal height and dimensions to the original villa.

According to witnesses and press reports, six of the 29 villas were levelled on the authority of licences issued after the ban was imposed. One of them, located on Mohieddin Abul-Ezz Street in Dokki, was partly destroyed on 20 February — one day after the decree was issued, witnesses said.

"The owners of villas in the Giza area *have gone into a frenzy of demolition,"* said the guard of a villa which workers began to pull down after the ban was imposed. The destruction was stopped after the Giza Governorate officials were referred for questioning. The owner was planning to build a high-rise apartment building in place of the villa, the guard said.

The officials who issued the demolition licences argue that they acted in accordance with the law, insisting that the destroyed structures were apartment blocks and not villas.

According to the definition of the Ministry of Housing, a villa should consist of one or two storeys only, linked by internal stairs, and should have one electric metre only as well as a garden. In statements to the press, the officials who are being questioned insisted that the destroyed structures were multiple-storey buildings and *each had more than one electric metre and* was inhabited by more than one family. One of these officials, Ahmed Taha, was quoted as saying that he had rejected 106 applications for demolition licences which would *have violated the ban.*

A committee was formed to look into the matter. The committee's chairman, Hussein Rabie, appeared to favour the view that the dismantled structures were apartment blocks, and not villas. But witnesses, including guards and neighbours, affirm that they were villas, each inhabited by a single family.

According to a 1977 law, a demolition licence can only be issued for a building that is more than 40 years old. Exceptions can be made if the demolition will serve a public interest, such as building a larger structure to accommodate more people.

"But after the prime min*ister's decree took effect, is*suing a demolition licence for a villa should be considered an administrative offence, even if the villa is more than 40 years old," said Yehia Ismail, former chairman of the Court of Appeals.

In another development, an Arabic-language newspaper launched a campaign to save the palace of the late actor Youssef Wahbi from "destruction." The palace, which is located in the Haram [pyramid] area of Giza, had been leased by Wahbi to a company to turn it into a hotel, with a swimming pool and cinema.

But Yehia Gaafar, head of the West Giza municipality, affirmed that the palace had not been touched. He explained that the hotel *company had only knocked* down a warehouse, located next to the palace kitchen, after cracks appeared on it following a 1992 earthquake. He added that the destruction of the warehouse was carried out without a licence.

Omar Lutfi, representative of the hotel company, insisted that a licence was acquired before the demolition was begun. The company, he said, applied for a licence on 18 October and a committee was formed by the Giza governorate to survey the building. The committee approved the demolition and the company paid fees for a demolition licence on 3 December, Lutfi added.

In a third development, the Governor of Giza, Maher El-Guindi, managed to stop the auction of a public garden in Al-Mohandessin district, organised by the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* [religious endowments]. El-Guindi published advertisements in newspapers warning potential buyers that the sale violated a cabinet decree that bans construction on green areas. Nadia Makram Ebeid, minister of state for environmental affairs, also stepped in to stop the sale.

Sheikh's last night

The circumstances surrounding the assassination of Sheikh Hassan El-Banna half a century ago continue to be shrouded in mystery. Now, a leftist historian has produced a *documentary about the life and death of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood.* **Fatemah Farag** reports

As motorists and pedestrians bustle outside the offices of the Muslim Youth Association on Ramses Street, many of them are unaware that, 49 years ago, this building was the scene of the assassination of one of the nation's most controversial figures. On 12 February 1949, Sheikh Hassan El-Banna, who 20 years earlier had founded the now-outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, was gunned down as he emerged from the Association's gate. The assassin, widely suspected to be a government agent, was never apprehended.

The site was re-visited recently by Salah Eissa, a leftist journalist and historian, who has produced a documentary about El-Banna's life and death under the title *The Night of the Assassination of Hassan El-Banna.* "The idea behind the film is two-fold," Eissa told *Al-Ahram Weekly.*

"On the one hand, I want to trace the roots of Islamist militancy, to show how El-Banna believed that his decision to establish the par*amilitary wing of the Brotherhood in 1936* was a necessity to counter the Jewish militias fighting in Palestine. I want to show that there will be no end to the phenomenon of extremism without a just and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace," Eissa said.

"On the other hand, I want to show how this paramilitary wing took on a life of its own and began to launch operations which El-Banna himself opposed, such as the assassinations of Khazendar and Nuqrashi," Eissa added.

Ahmed El-Khazendar, a judge notorious for the harsh sentences he passed against Broth*erhood members, was killed in March 1948.* Prime Minister Mahmoud Fahmi El-Nuqrashi was assassinated in December of the same year.

According to Eissa, the killings were not *meant to serve the Brotherhood's objectives,* but were part of a vendetta between the paramilitary wing and various authorities. As a result, the tables were turned against El-Banna himself, Eissa said.

It is widely believed that El-Banna's assassination was carried out on the orders of the government in retaliation for the killing of Nuqrashi.

Eissa's *documentary has been greeted with* suspicion on the part of El-Banna's son, lawyer Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna. "All I care about is that the film does not include anything which is untrue," Seif El-Islam said. "*This does not mean that I am trying to stop* anyone from expressing his views."

Although he agreed with Eissa to reserve judgement until he has seen the film, Seif El-Islam made it clear that he "would not give up the right, if necessary, to take legal action."

Seif El-Islam is worried because the 140-minute documentary does not include interviews with any member of El-Banna's family or the Brotherhood. Eissa interviewed Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tagammu Party and a one-time member of the Brotherhood, Rifat El-Said, the Tagammu secretary-general, Hassan Hanafi, a professor of philosophy, and Assem El-Dessouki, professor of history and dean of the Faculty of Arts, Helwan University.

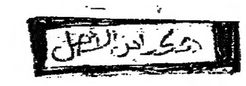
"I wanted to keep the film objective and scientific," said Eissa. "In addition to piles of documents, more than 100 books have been written on the subject. I think that the information included in the film is quite sound."

However, Seif El-Islam is worried by Eissa's use of interviews with Brotherhood opponents such as Mohieddin and El-Said.

Eissa responded: "Mohieddin was a witness to the events. He recounts how he and Gamal Abdel-Nasser took the oath over a gun when they joined the Brotherhood. They later broke with them and established the Free Officers Movement."

Eissa also explained that El-Said and Hanafi appear *in the documentary* as authorities on the subject, not politicians. "The former was very critical, the latter was very supportive. Dessouki and myself were neutral," he said.

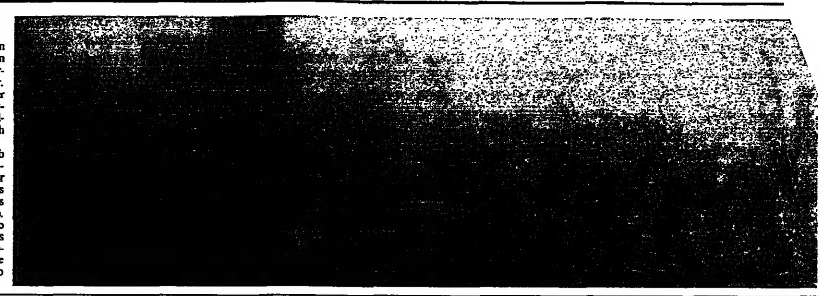
Eissa emphasised that he did not wish the documentary, which he produced at his own personal expense, to be used as political propaganda either for, or against, the Brotherhood.





هكذا من الأصل

Yellow skies



SANDSTORMS brought death, chaos and misery to Cairo and other parts of Egypt and the Middle East this week. On Sunday, five people died and 40 others were injured in road accidents caused by poor visibility and the collapse of old buildings. Traffic at Cairo International Airport and through the Suez Canal was disrupted.

The first storm lashed the country Sunday morning, tapering off 24 hours later. But hardly had people started breathing fresh air again when a second storm hit on Tuesday. Cairo Airport shut down on Sunday and shipping in the Suez Canal came to a halt.

Also on Sunday, the plane bringing British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook to Cairo was diverted to Cyprus, where he was forced to spend one night before beginning an official visit to Egypt on Monday. Another plane bringing Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Said El-Sahhaf from New York to Cairo was diverted to Sharm El-Sheikh. He was on his way to a conference of Islamic foreign ministers in Qatar.

Sunday's storm also pummelled other parts of the Middle East, including Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria and Israel. A landmark ferris wheel along the Beirut beach was heavily damaged.

On Tuesday, a plane bringing Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid from Qatar was diverted to Luxor and a Middle East Airlines plane was forced to return to Beirut, just 15 minutes before it was scheduled to land in Cairo. A flight from Jeddah was diverted to Sharm El-Sheikh and a TWA plane was forced to fly to Larnaca. Alexandria harbour remained closed on Tuesday, for the third day running. Suez harbour was also shut down on Tuesday.

Upholding press integrity

As the battle against the 'yellow' press continues, the Press Syndicate Council has taken a series of decisions to ensure the integrity of the profession, reports **Shaden Shehab**



Makram Mohamed Ahmed

Chairman of the Press Syndicate Council Makram Mohamed Ahmed has vowed to enforce a journalistic code of ethics once it is approved by the Supreme Press Council. "The syndicate will not allow any violation of the code of ethics nor will it allow any deviant behaviour," Ahmed said.

Ahmed added that letters were sent to all press organisations, urging them not to hire non-syndicate members, which is prohibited by the press law. Any violation of this law or the code of ethics will be reported to the prosecutor-general, he warned.

Defending the syndicate, Ahmed said it should not be held responsible for the emergence of the so-called 'yellow' press because most of reporters working in such newspapers are not syndicate members. He recalled that the syndicate had sounded the alarm about this phenomenon.

On Saturday, the syndicate's council decided to establish four committees, assigning each a specific responsibility. The first will draft the executive statutes of the press law. The second will draw up guidelines for the ethics of the profession and disciplinary action. The third will examine the rules of establishing newspapers and printing locally newspapers which have foreign licences. The fourth committee will prepare for a plenary conference of journalists.

Last week, the syndicate's council decided to refer the chief editors of two newspapers, whose names were not divulged, to the prosecutor-general. A professional ethics committee was also established to examine readers' complaints. Any offending journalist will be referred to a disciplinary board and may lose his syndicate membership.

Mohamed Abdel-Aal, editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan Al-Arabi*, was expelled from the syndicate for "exposing the private lives of public figures libelously and unjustifiably." The Shura Council also stripped Abdel-Aal of his parliamentary immunity to investigate a number of libel complaints involving him.

In another development, Ahmed requested of the prosecutor-general to suspend a one-year jail sentence passed against Magdi Hussein, chief editor of the opposition *Al-Shaab* newspaper, until the Court of Cassation reaches a final verdict. Hussein was found guilty of slandering Ala'a El-Alfi, son of former Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi. The syndicate and other mediators are attempting to reach an out-of-court settlement between Hussein and the El-Alfi family.

Hussein has been transferred from prison to hospital for health problems.

US diplomats sound out opposition figures

The US Embassy says there is nothing unusual about recent meetings between its diplomats and opposition figures. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

A London-based Arabic newspaper was the first to break the news last Thursday that a senior diplomat at the US Embassy in Cairo held meetings in late February and early March with Islamist opposition figures. In these meetings, the newspaper *Al-Hayat* said, the diplomat sought their views on a variety of issues, including Iraq and their confrontation with the government.

Rick Roberts, spokesman for the US Embassy, denied in a telephone interview that these meetings targeted members of political Islamist groups in particular. He said embassy diplomats "regularly meet with a wide spectrum of Egyptians, including politicians, economists and experts who represent all points of view." Roberts stressed that "there was nothing unusual about those meetings."

Abul-Ela Madi, a former member of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood who is seeking to establish Al-Wasat [Centre] Party, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he decided to break the news of his meeting with Robert Silverman, second secretary for political affairs at the US Embassy, after he learned that an anti-Islamist weekly magazine would publish a report on the subject.

"I feared that they [the magazine] would capitalise on the matter and make it appear as if we were conspiring against the state in cooperation with the US Embassy," Madi said. "But there was nothing significant about this meeting. In the past few years, I met with three US diplomats who used to occupy the same post."

Silverman's office said he was away for a few weeks, on a trip to the United States.

Madi resigned from the Brotherhood after the "old guards" controlling the group reportedly refused to back his efforts to establish Al-Wasat Party, which he describes as a centrist, moderate party with an Islamist platform. The Political Parties Committee, which is empowered to approve or reject the establishment of any new party, turned down Madi's application for a licence. The Political Parties Tribunal is expected to reach a final decision on the issue in the near future.

Al-Hayat on Friday quoted Montasser El-Zayyat, a lawyer for Islamist militants, as saying he held a similar meeting with Silverman. El-Zayyat is known for his close connections with Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, which is held responsible for most anti-government acts of violence since 1992. He announced in January that he was retiring from political activity because he failed to persuade Al-Gama'a's expatriate leaders to back his initiative for a unilateral cease-fire.

El-Zayyat told the *Weekly* that he "has nothing to add on this issue." He was quoted by *Al-Hayat* as saying that in his meeting with Silverman he did not only reject any intervention attempt by Washington but also warned that the US policy on Iraq might lead to attacks by militants against its interests in the region.

Rafik Habib, who is cooperating with Madi in the attempt to establish Al-Wasat, volunteered to tell the same newspaper on Saturday that he was also approached by the US Embassy. A meeting, held in January, was with another diplomat responsible for the human rights section. The diplomat, according to Habib, asked about his reaction to a Congressional report on the conditions of Copts.

Spokesman Roberts said, "The embassy, like all embassies in Cairo, meets with lots of people. This goes on constantly. The people who are doing this are doing their jobs." He added that the embassy does not ask for a prior permission from authorities to approach Egyptians it would like to talk to.

In subsequent press reports about the meetings between the US diplomats and the opposition figures, newspapers affirmed that all Egyptians rejected any US attempt to intervene in domestic affairs.

Asking Madi whether he agrees that such meetings as the one he held represented such intervention, he told the *Weekly* that one clear message he sought to convey to the US diplomat whom he met was that "Islamists are aware that America may use them to put pressure on the government." In the meeting with Silverman, "I spoke extensively of what we see as double standards in the way America deals with regional issues, such as Israel and Iraq," Madi said.

"When the US Embassy gathers information, it is not doing this just for information purposes, but to prepare files which they can use as pressure tools while dealing with the government. We [Islamists] are aware of this," he added.

For his part, Habib said that he told the US diplomat that "Washington's intervention in this matter [the conditions of Copts] does more harm than good. Threatening to freeze aid, for example, because of alleged violations of the rights of Christians will hurt Christians and Muslims alike."

A security source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that the announcement by the Islamists that they held meetings with US diplomats "might be an attempt to show that they are still active on the political scene, particularly in the case of Montasser El-Zayyat."

Bar crisis drags on

The Bar Association's status has become something of an enigma, prompting a visit by a fact-finding mission from the International Committee of Jurists. **Fatemah Farag** follows the latest developments

Within the framework of a campaign initiated by the Arab Centre for the Freedom of Judges and Lawyers, a delegation from the Geneva-based International Committee of Jurists visited Cairo from 10 to 15 March. The team members, Niel Davidson and Pierre Sebastien, were under strict instructions not to give any statements to the press until their final report is issued — probably within two weeks. However, a statement by the Arab Centre explained that the aim of the visit was to investigate "the truth of claims that the judicial committee responsible for Bar Association elections is placing obstacles before these elections and whether rumours that the government is intervening in the Association's affairs are true."

To this end, the delegation met with Ahmed Fathi Sorour, speaker of the People's Assembly; Awad El-Morr, president of the Supreme Constitutional Court; custodians of the Association and independent lawyers.

The Association, previously controlled by the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, was placed under custodianship by a court order in January 1996.

The Association is currently run by three custodians: Hassan El- Mahdi, Ahmed Reda El-Ghawalli and Mohmed Sabri Mobada. There is also a judicial committee, headed by Judge Mahfouz Shouman, president of the Southern Giza Court, which was assigned by the government to set a date for the Association's elections.

The current status of the Association remains unclear to many. "I no longer care about all the news in the press about the fights and developments at the Bar Association," said Mohamed Attia, a young lawyer, while running up the stairs of the Southern Giza Court. "The fights no longer have anything to do with the majority of lawyers. They are between the big guys, about their own interests."

The cynicism aside, Bar Association news is sometimes baffling to the common reader. For example, last week began with the news that the new custodians of the Association's Cairo branch had been approved by all concerned parties; the next day, they were not admitted into the premises and, on the third day, they took over. Nasser Amin, director of the Arab Centre, explains that "the only way anyone can understand news like this is to comprehend that there is a continuous fight for power among the three custodians and what happens on the ground is a reflection of how the balance of power is swaying." In the same vein, Ahmed Seif, a lawyer with the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid, points out that "everything that is happening now is an election game. There will be elections sooner or later and people are trying to line themselves up for senior positions."

The events of early March do have a specific significance because the take-over of the Association's branches has been a point of contention. According to the law which regulates the Association's activities, branches have relative autonomy from the mother Association. They have independently-elected councils and separate administrative and financial hierarchies. Accordingly, the court order, handed down on 18 January 1996, which placed the Association under custodianship, was not automatically extended to the branches. "Only the weak branches, like the ones in Beni Suef or Fayoum, were drawn in by the custodians," explained Atef El-Shahat, a lawyer at the Arab Centre. "The more powerful ones — and there are about nine of them — were not so easy."

In fact, orders for placing the Cairo and Giza branches under custodianship were only issued on 18 and 21 October 1997 respectively.

Lawyers, eager to revive the independence of their Association, met in an an extraordinary general assembly on 15 May 1997 and elected a provisional committee, headed by Mohamed Asfour. Although the legality of this Committee is disputed, it initiated legal action before the Southern Giza Court and the Supreme Administrative Court demanding that a date be set for elections. In a ruling handed down in December 1996, an Administrative Court had called on the responsible parties to prepare voters' lists in preparation for elections which would end the custodianship. But obviously this has not been done until now.

Amin warns against stressing the Brotherhood vs government aspect of the crisis. "The whole situation is seen, especially abroad, as a fight between the *Ikhwan* and the government," he said. "It is important to create the awareness that the present situation is primarily about the profession and the legality of professional unions. That is why these fact-finding missions from abroad are very important." The next delegation, from the Paris Bar Association, will arrive in April.

Finally, Seif points out that in addition to all the legal manoeuvring and awareness campaigns, "there has to be a movement from within the ranks of the lawyers themselves calling for the redemption of their syndicate."

Nurse Aida faces the gallows

Nurses staged on-the-job protests and the defendant's father ended up in police custody after an Alexandria nurse was convicted of killing patients and sentenced to death. **Mona El-Nahhas** reports



photo: Yasser El-Badawi

The Alexandria Criminal Court found nurse Aida Noureddin Mohamed guilty last week of killing one patient and attempting to kill dozens of others in the neurology department of Alexandria University Hospital. The court has referred Aida's case to Mufti of the Republic Nasr Farid Wasil — a technicality before a death sentence is officially announced. Final pronouncement of the sentence is expected on 26 March.

Aida, 25, who pleaded innocent when the trial opened in January, remains in the Damanhour women's prison. When the court's decision was announced on 11 March, the nurse broke into tears, her mother fainted and her father slapped his cheeks hysterically.

Prosecutors had demanded the death penalty on the grounds that during her interrogation, she made a detailed confession, admitting that she injected patients with a substance that causes respiratory failure. The prosecutors said that all her victims were patients of neurologist Hisham Abu-Rahma, 37. They claimed that she sought to take revenge against the doctor because he spurned her love.

Aida was considered a model nurse by her colleagues at the Alexandria University Hospital. She worked at the intensive care ward of the neurology department for seven years before her arrest last August.

During her interrogation at a police station last August, police said she attempted to commit suicide by jumping from a third-floor window. She suffered bone fractures and had to be hospitalised.

The court's decision drew angry reactions from Aida's colleagues and family. The day after the verdict, more than 200 nurses organised a sit-in strike in the hospital's courtyard to show solidarity with her and publicise their fear that they might face the same fate. Following a few hours of disorder, the hospital's administrators managed to persuade the nurses to go back to work by pointing out that court rulings can be contested through legal channels.

Aida's uncle and father were taken in for questioning by police after they pasted leaflets around Alexandria proclaiming her innocence. Publicly questioning a court decision is illegal, and posting of unauthorised fliers, political or otherwise, is forbidden under the emergency laws.

Under Egyptian law, any death sentence must be approved by the Court of Cassation before it is carried out. Aida's lawyer vowed to file an appeal, saying that she is not the only one who should be held responsible for what happened. He pointed out that Aida, or any other nurse for that matter, has no authority to give patients medicine without a written order from a doctor.

A source at the prosecutor's office said that further investigations will be made after the court pronounces its sentence. Court hearings, he added, made it clear that there was negligence on the part of hospital administrators, who still may face prosecution.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Tragedy in Tarqumia

The murder of three Palestinian workers by Israeli soldiers has sparked off a week of protests, in which at least one person has died. Khaled Amayreh reports from Jerusalem on the continuing violence in the West Bank

The seemingly-deliberate murder by Israeli soldiers of three Palestinian labourers at the Tarqumia junction near Hebron on 10 March sparked off a "mini Intifada" throughout the Occupied Territories. Sporadic but violent clashes between stone-hurling Palestinian protesters and heavily-armed Israeli soldiers erupted in Hebron, Dura, Bethlehem, Ramallah and other localities in the West Bank.

At the time *Al-Ahram Weekly* went to press, violent clashes were still taking place in Hebron and other areas, fueled by the death early on Tuesday 17 March of 11-year-old Sumer Karameh. Karameh died from a critical injury sustained when Israeli soldiers opened fire on a group of Palestinian youngsters who were protesting the Tarqumia carnage last week.

According to sources at the Al-Ahli Hospital in Hebron, Karameh had been "clinically dead" ever since his admission to hospital on Wednesday 11 March. Hospital Principal Dr Yousef Al-Sharawi told the *Weekly* that a rubber-coated metal bullet (of a type often inaccurately referred to as just "rubber bullets") pierced the child's brain, causing a massive and fatal haemorrhage.

In Hebron most of the unrest occurred in and around the Bab El-Zawiya neighbourhood and on nearby Shallala Street, the so-called "friction line" separating the PA-administered area, known as H-1, and the Israeli-controlled Old Town, known as H-2, where the Ibrahimi Mosque is located. Generally speaking, the protests followed a hit-and-run pattern. Palestinian protesters, mostly youngsters and school pupils, hurled stones toward (rather than at or even onto) fairly distant and fully prepared Israeli soldiers, who responded with the often lethal rubber-coated metal bullets, which eventually killed the child Karameh and, as of Tuesday 17 March, have injured over 50 other Palestinians.

The unrest took an ugly turn on Friday night 13 March, when Israeli settlers celebrating a Jewish holiday entered the PA-administered area, attacking Palestinians and vandalising property. When Palestinian cameramen sought to video the frantic rampage, Israeli soldiers stationed on neighbouring rooftops opened fire on the journalists, injuring eight, one of them, Nael Shuyokhi, seriously.

The ostensibly deliberate attack on the Palestinian cameramen was apparently meant to intimidate Palestinian and other journalists and to deter them from "crossing the red lines" — for example, filming the settlers re-enacting their own *Crystalnacht*, this time in Hebron.

Protesting the shooting, more than 25 Palestinian journalists and cameramen organised a demonstration in Hebron during which they carried their cameras on stretchers to dramatise the real perils facing them while covering events in the Occupied Territories. One sign carried by the journalists read: "Don't kill the messenger," while another said: "I'm a journalist, don't kill me." The protesting journalists then held a press conference at Hebron City Hall, where they called on their colleagues around the world to identify with their plight and to try to exert pressure on the Israeli government to stop attacks on journalists. According to Naim Tubasi, head of the Palestinian Journalist Union, 54 Palestinian journalists have been moderately-to-seriously injured by Israeli gunfire since September 1996.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, thousands of mostly Islamist demonstrators set fire to American and Israeli flags in Nablus to protest the Tarqumia carnage. The protesters marched toward an Israeli military position in Nablus, shouting "Gestapo! Gestapo!" at Israeli soldiers. The demonstrators were eventually turned back by PA police who used tear gas to disperse them.

In Dura, 13 miles south-west of Hebron, the three murdered labourers were laid to rest on Wednesday 11 March in a solemn procession unprecedented in the town's history. An eyewitness survivor of the carnage related how the Israeli soldiers continued to fire on the workers even as they were screaming "we are workers, we are workers." Hamdan Rajoub, who narrowly escaped the soldiers' bullets, stressed that the car posed no threat whatsoever to the life of the soldiers, adding that they "killed in cold blood for the sake of killing."

The murder of the three poor apolitical labourers has stunned Dura. Sheikh Nayef Rajoub, imam of the Grand Mosque in Dura who eulogised the three workers before their burial, went on to ridicule the Israeli account of the incident. He asked, "What could possibly make those poor workers who were returning to their families provoke the heavily-armed and trigger-happy Israeli soldiers?"

Initially, the Israeli army said shots had been fired from the Palestinian car, prompting the soldiers to return fire. Then, a few hours later, an Israeli army spokesman said the car was trying to run over one of the soldiers, a charge which nearly a hundred eyewitnesses agreed was completely fabricated.

The Tarqumia atrocity and its aftermath have enraged an already-exasperated Palestinian people. First, three day labourers, who never posed a threat to anyone as their main preoccupation was to earn enough to buy bread for their children, were murdered in cold blood. Then, their three Israeli killers were released after spending only 13 hours in token incarceration. Finally, and most gruesomely, there was a public outcry in Israel, not over the murder of the three Palestinian labourers, but over the "unjust incarceration of the three soldiers." In other words, the crime from the Israeli collective viewpoint was not the butchering of the three Palestinians, but the incarceration for 13 hours of the three butchers. One senior Israeli politician, Transportation Minister Joshua Yahlom, even went so far as to demand that the military officer who ordered the detention of the three soldiers be dismissed from service.

The effect upon the Palestinian community has been, predictably, to stir up an anger and a bitterness of which the continuing riots are simply the most visible sign. Once again, the hope that Israeli society might be making the transition from the psychology of war to the psychology of peace has proved unfounded.



Israeli border policemen stand guard over Palestinian street vendors in Jerusalem's old city (photo: AFP)

Shooting from the hip

Twice in the space of a week, Ariel Sharon has moved to sabotage official Israeli diplomacy, thus *confirming his reputation as a "loose cannon"*. But when the dust settles, will the Israelis have reason to rue his "spontaneity"? Graham Usher asks

Israel's National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon has long had the reputation of a politician who shoots from the hip. And, in the last week, he has fired off a couple of rounds which illuminate his understanding of Israel's "peace" with the Arab world.

Last Friday, Sharon preferred a solution to Israel's 20-year-old occupation of south Lebanon. "We are prepared to implement a pull-out in stages while monitoring the consequences that might ensue," he told Israel's Channel 2 television.

The idea — which Sharon intends to bring before the Israeli cabinet later this week — is that Israel would withdraw from "part" of south Lebanon, but without any prior arrangements with the Lebanese government. Should the Lebanese army maintain "quiet" in the evacuated territory, Israel would withdraw from another "part" and so on. Should, however, quiet not be maintained, Israel "would hold Lebanon responsible for any future cross-border attacks." The implication is that, in such circumstances, Israel would extend its war beyond the current 12 per cent of Lebanese territory it occupies to Lebanon as a whole.

Sharon's plan was swiftly shot down by Israel's military establishment. "Sharon's formula will return the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) to Lebanon in a big way and will sink it deep into the mud," said a "senior security source" in *Yediot Aharonot* on 15 March. Other commentators have averred that Sharon's aim with the phased withdrawal proposal is less to achieve peace with Lebanon than to scuttle Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai's recent offer to leave south Lebanon in line with UN Resolution 425. This, say the commentators, would involve Israel in negotiations with Syria not only about south Lebanon but also about the occupied Golan Heights. Like most Israeli politicians, Sharon sees south Lebanon as turf that is ultimately dispensable: the Golan, however, is another matter.

Sharon's attempt to segregate south Lebanon from the Golan will have set the alarm bells ringing in Beirut and Damascus. The next day — and again on Channel 2 — he pulled off a similar coup over Amman and Gaza. This time Sharon was discussing his role in calming the crisis in Israel-Jordan relations caused by the Mossad's botched attempt to kill Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al in Amman last August. "I said [to King Hussein], you should know that we will liquidate Misha'al. I can tell you that we won't do it on your soil," he told viewers.

Jordan responded to Sharon's comments with ill-disguised fury. On 15 March, Israel's ambassador to Jordan, Oded Eran, was summoned to the Jordanian Foreign Ministry. "Jordan has once again expressed to Israel its total rejection of any attack on any of its citizens, whether inside or outside Jordan, and that it considers any such attack a violation of its own security," said one Jordanian official. There are reasons for Jordan's embarrassment.

Since the Misha'al imbroglio, security relations between Israel and Jordan (which form the greater part of the 1994 peace treaty between the two countries) have been strained. King Hussein had made it clear that full cooperation could only be restored with the exit of Mossad's Director, Danny Yatom. Israeli premier Binyamin Netanyahu was reluctant to remove him. Following the disclosure last month that Mossad agents had been caught attempting to bug the home of a suspected Hizbullah activist in Switzerland; however, Yatom resigned and, on 15 March, was formally replaced as Mossad's head by Ephraim Halevy, Israel's former envoy to the European Union.

Sharon's comments, however, have sunk the "new relationship" before it had got afloat. The unravelling was greeted with some irony by the Palestinian Authority (PA), who have viewed Sharon's increasingly cosy relationship with Jordan with trepidation. "It is strange that Sharon should make such statements after meetings between Israeli and Jordanian officials in which both sides agreed to open a so-called 'new chapter' in security cooperation," PA Information Minister Yassir Abed Rabbo told Voice of Palestine radio on 16 March. Yet "despite this, Israel says it will continue with the terrorism, assassinations and hijackings that it has conducted in the past".

Hamas were less ironic. "If they [the Israelis] assassinate Misha'al, it will cost them very dear and they will regret it for the rest of their lives," Abdel-Aziz Al-Rantisi, Hamas political leader in Gaza, told Reuters on 15 March.

Surviving together — barely

Egyptian workers in Iraq feel closer to their hosts. But exile is never easy, and many now feel it is too late to return home. Khaled Dawoud writes from Baghdad

Most of the hundreds of Egyptians who gathered at the Sudanese Cultural Club in downtown Baghdad to watch Egypt play South Africa in the final of the African Nations Cup did not recognise any of the players. The only exception was the team's captain, Hossam Hassan, whom they last saw play in the Italy 1990 World Cup.

"He's got older. He wasn't old in Italy," said one of the viewers, speaking in a *fallahi* (Egyptian peasant) accent. But the day when most of those sitting at the Sudanese club last saw Hossam Hassan play is far from a happy memory.

In June 1990, only two months before Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, thousands of Egyptians thronged the streets of Baghdad to celebrate Egypt's draw against the Netherlands, an event they considered a "national victory." An angry Iraqi driving at high speed through one of the demonstrations of joy, killed several Egyptians. Shortly after, newspapers in Egypt were full of reports of "flying coffins," — bodies of Egyptian workers returning from Iraq in airplanes.

"After the Iraq-Iran War [1980 to 1989], Iraqi soldiers came back from the battle front to find Egyptians had taken most of their jobs, and, in some cases, even their wives," said Ahmed Khallaf, an Egyptian worker. "So, relations were bad [between Iraqis and Egyptians], and many people left," he added.

Before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the 1991 Gulf War, there were an estimated 2 million Egyptians working in Iraq. It was a favourite destination for poor Egyptians, particularly those from rural and southern Egypt, without education or skills. Al-Muraba'h quarter off Rasheed Street and Al-Rasafi Square were nearly 100 per cent Egyptian zones which even the Iraqi police would think twice before entering.

Now, nearly eight years after the war, there are still 150,000 to 200,000 Egyptians in Iraq. They no longer look like Egyptians: they speak with an Iraqi accent, and their last memories of home are at least 10-years-old. "We all arrived here either in 1988, 89 or shortly before the invasion of Kuwait, and we are all in our mid-thirties," said Girgis Abdel-Maseeh, a maître d'hôtel at what used to be a "five-star" establishment.

When workers from Egypt, Sudan, Morocco and Yemen went to Iraq before 1990, one Iraqi dinar was worth $3, and each worker was allowed to transfer abroad up to $800 a month. That was a lot of money for most of them, who had left poverty behind to go in search of a better life. But everything collapsed after the 1990 invasion. Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians lost their life savings which they had kept in Iraqi banks. Those with a capital of 2,000 Iraqi dinars suddenly found themselves unable to buy even a loaf of bread, as the price of the dinar collapsed. Today, the exchange rate stands at 1,500 dinars to the dollar.

"We feel trapped," said Abdel-Maseeh. "I am now 33, I cannot go back to my family and tell them give me money. I would feel so ashamed of myself," he added.

Khallaf, from the Nile Delta city of Damanhour, tells a similar story: "I cannot say that I am suffering in Iraq. I work in a printing shop and make reasonable money. But all that I have right now is 1 million Iraqi dinars ($600). What can I do with that money? It's not even enough to make the trip to Jordan and buy some clothes for my nephews and cousins. After 10 years, I cannot return empty-handed."

Atef Mohamed, from Menufiya province, has also been in Iraq for nine years. He said that none of the Egyptians who decided to remain in Iraq had expected the economic embargo would last so long. "Each year, we thought the sanctions would be lifted, and we would be able to get our money back. But it never happened."

A rumour that the Egyptian Embassy in Baghdad was receiving applications from workers for compensation for the losses they sustained during the Gulf War inevitably meant nothing but chaos. Workers interviewed said they were mistreated at the Egyptian Embassy and pushed away by guards standing at the gates. "We just wanted to understand the rules, but nobody would talk to us," said Khallaf. The embassy asked 2,500 dinars from each Egyptian in order to fill in a form, "and it has been more than six months now, and we still haven't heard anything about our applications," he added.

After Iraq signed its recent deal with the United Nations allowing the UN weapons' inspection team to enter presidential palaces, hopes are high again that the sanctions would be lifted, and most Egyptians interviewed thought the present situation could last no more than one or two years. "So, we are going to stay and see what will happen. In any case, we feel we have no place in Egypt," said Abdel-Maseeh.

Most Egyptians interviewed felt that they were often portrayed back home as criminals and drug dealers, which is another reason why they are afraid of returning. Others still believe that a government employee gets no more than LE45 a month, and they know nothing about the growing tourism industry in the Sinai, the Toshka project, the Cairo underground, or any of the other major changes that have taken place in Egypt over the last 10 years.

As for relations with the Iraqis, all of those interviewed said there were no major problems right now between the two sides. "We stood beside them when US bombs were rocking Baghdad. We also lived together through eight years of sanctions. So, we now feel the same, no difference between an Egyptian and an Iraqi," said Abdel-Maseeh

UN to hear Lockerbie case

***In a new development in the ongoing Lockerbie crisis, the UN Security Council will meet for the first time tomorrow in 'open session' to discuss the issue.* Rasha Saad reports**

In light of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling of 27 February, which states that it has the jurisdiction to settle the Lockerbie dispute, Libya has lobbied for an open session in the Security Council at which the issue can be thoroughly discussed.

Libya's request was presented to the council through Bahrain, as the current representative of the Arab countries on the Security Council. The session has been scheduled for 20 March.

The open session will be attended by members of the Security Council, Libyan representatives and representatives of regional organisations such as the Arab League and the Organisation of African Unity.

In preparation for the session, the seven-member committee of the Arab League which was formed to try and resolve the Lockerbie issue, whose members include Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania, Egypt and Syria, met on Sunday with the League's secretary-general, Esmat Abdel-Meguid.

Talaat Hamed, spokesman for the Arab League, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the committee had discussed developments concerning the Lockerbie issue, and reached a united Arab position that will be presented during the open session tomorrow.

The committee will also coordinate with the five-member committee of the Organisation of African Unity dealing with the Lockerbie issue before tomorrow's session.

In April 1992, the Security Council imposed sanctions against Libya for refusing to hand over for trial in either the US or Britain two Libyans suspected of bombing an American aircraft over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, killing 271 people.

Libya has denied any involvement in the bombing and refuses to extradite its two nationals to either the US or Britain.

As a result, an air and arms embargo was imposed on Libya. Sanctions included the downgrading of diplomatic relations and a freeze on certain Libyan assets abroad.

In an attempt to solve the dispute, Tripoli, supported by Arab and African countries, presented three alternative solutions to the crisis: trying the suspects in a neutral country, trying them before Scottish judges at the ICJ in The Hague, or establishing a special court to hear the case. These options were rejected outright by the United States and Britain. Arab political commentators have accused both the US and Britain of refusing to seek a solution to the Lockerbie issue for political reasons. According to these commentators, the aim of the sanctions is nothing less than to push the Libyan people into overthrowing their leader.

Though the Security Council decided on 12 March to maintain the sanctions against Libya, both Libya and the Arab League are optimistic about tomorrow's meeting, which they see as a step towards the total lifting of sanctions. They believe that the ICJ ruling will force the US and Britain to be more flexible.

"The ICJ judgement puts both the US and Britain in a corner. It shows that from the legal point of view Libya has a point and so there is a chance that the US and Britain will reconsider their positions," the League's Hamed said.

Ibrahim Legwell, the Tripoli-based lawyer for the two Libyan suspects, told the *Weekly* that the the Security Council's agreement to hold an open session is in itself a good sign.

He believes that the US has recently been toning down its attacks on Libya. He quoted Bill Richardson, the US ambassador to the UN, as saying that the US target is to achieve justice, and not to take revenge on Libya.

Legwell agrees that the verdict of the ICJ may be one reason the Security Council did not refuse to hold the meeting. "However," he added, "we should not underestimate the efforts of the regional organisations such as the Arab League and the Organisation of African Unity."

He believes the regional organisations now have the ball in their court and can begin to lobby for the total lifting of sanctions against Libya.



هكذا من الأصل

Who will listen to me now?

In these excerpts from his diaries, **Khalil Al-Sakakini** records the conditions of life in Jerusalem in March 1948, and gathers reports of a great Arab victory when a Jewish convoy returning to Jerusalem was ambushed and destroyed



50 Years of dispossession



Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini (centre) with his men shortly before he was killed on April 7, 1948, at Al-Qastel battle

"Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini visited us along with some of his men...I seized the opportunity and drew their attention to the ethics to be followed in every war, anywhere and at all times: the wounded must be taken good care of; the hostages must be well-treated; anybody killed must be handed back to his people. We must follow the commandments of Abou Bakr to his army on its way to Palestine: 'Do not kill a child, an old person, or a woman; do not burn trees, or demolish a single house; do not chase someone who is running away; do not mutilate the bodies of the dead; and do not go near those who have dedicated themselves to worshipping God"

Saturday, 17 January, 1948

I was sitting behind my desk, and [my son] Sarri was standing next to me reading *Al-Ahram* newspaper when he said, "Listen to this!" and began reading aloud:

"Fouad the First Academy of the Arabic Language held a session yesterday and elected two new members: Mr Mohamed *Reda Al-Shabibi* from Iraq and *Mr Khalil Al-Sakakini* from Palestine."

What I began in the spirit of play has now turned into a serious matter, and here I am a member of the Academy of the Arabic Language. I am now one of the immortals, let it be known to all!

Tuesday, 16 March, 1948

I do not know how for God's sake we are supposed to hold out faced with the aggression of the Jews, who are well-trained, organised, united and equipped with the most sophisticated weapons while we lack all that. Cannot we understand that unity and organisation will win over fragmentation and anarchy, and preparedness over negligence?

We formed a delegation and went to the [headquarters] of the [Arab] Supreme Committee. We were received by Dr Hussein Al-Khaldi and Ahmed Helmi Pasha. We asked for arms. They said: "We have no arms." We asked for guards. They said: "We have no guards." We said: "What shall we do then?" They said: "Arm and defend yourselves."

We said: "We do not have arms, and even if we buy some we would not know how to use them. This is very serious: our neighbourhood following the blasting of the Semiramis Hotel, the Shabin block of flats, the houses of Dr Freig, the Anatbawis' and the Bediris', as well as other houses, have become very unsafe, and we can be attacked again at any minute. It is your duty, being members of the Supreme Committee to provide us with *arms* and men. Where are all those trained volunteers? Where is all that money being collected from Arab and Islamic countries? Is it a matter of much ado about nothing?"

Following that meeting a delegate from the Supreme Committee in Jerusalem came to visit us and enquire into how we were faring. He assured us that guards had been stationed in Katamon.

Sunday, 21 March, 1948

The Jews launched a violent attack on Katamon last night at midnight. It is midday now and they have not finished yet. The number of shells fired by cannons, bullets from all sorts of guns and machine-guns, and mines being used are unprecedented. In all his battles, Kitchener probably never heard such shelling as that we have been hearing since last night.

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Last week Abou Moussa (Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini) visited us along with some of his men: Abou Al-Abd Ibrahim Abou Diah from Soreif, the mayor of Rafat, Abou Atta, and Kamel Erikat. I seized the opportunity and drew their attention to the ethics to be followed in every war, anywhere and at all times:

1- The wounded must be taken good care of.

2- The hostages must be well-treated.

3- Anybody killed must be handed back to his people.

4- We must follow the commandments of Abou Bakr (the first Guided Khaliph) to his army on its way to Palestine: "Do not kill a child, an old person, or a woman; do not burn trees, or demolish a single house; do not chase someone who is running away; do not mutilate the bodies of the dead; *and do not go near* those who have dedicated themselves to worshipping God."

If it were up to me, I would say: "Let your swords rest in their scabbards, do not fight anybody, there is enough room in the world for all." But who would listen to me now or pay any attention to what I think? Like Jesus, therefore, I say: "My kingdom is not of this world."

***

The hiss of bullets goes on day and night, unabated, the like of which we had never heard before, not even during these past world wars. Whenever we go into our houses, we expect the ceiling to fall on our heads; and whenever we walk, it is always in the shadow of a wall or of sand-filled barrels, as we are always afraid of being hit by a stray bullet.

It is worth recording that whenever the roar of bombs and mines or the hiss of bullets intensifies, friends and family phone us one after the other, no matter the hour. Our house is located in an area of Katamon that looks from afar like the mouth of a volcano constantly belching out fire and smoke. They keep phoning to know whether we still exist. We congratulate each other on our safety, though we feel just as Mutanabi felt when he said:

"Though I am safe now, I may not live long, for I walk from death to death."

No wonder, in such a state of affairs, that inhabitants of Katamon are constantly thinking of moving to another neighbour*hood, or even another country. They want to run away from* this constant worry and the danger confronting them day and night. What depresses one so much is the terror which overtakes women and children. Many people have left to the old city, to Beit Jala, to Amman, to Cairo or wherever. Very few of the proprietors have remained. There is us, the Mahfouz brothers, Farid Srouji, Daoud Taleil and Youssef Abdou.

Sunday, 28 March, 1948

All day we have been gathering whatever news we can of the battle in the south between a Jewish convoy and the Arabs. All we knew at the beginning was that the Arabs attacked the convoy while it was on its way back to Jerusalem. We also learned that the Arabs erected barricades as high as walls in the way of the convoy, and that the [British] army was unable to get to the battlefield. We kept hearing deep shelling from afar, and we were afraid that the army was pounding the Arabs with their cannons. It was even said that the Jews had bombed the Arabs from aeroplanes using many tons of bombs. At nine o'clock we switched on the radio and listened to what it had to say:

"14 Jewish men were killed, while nearly 45 others were injured. The rest ran to shelter in an empty house, but the Arabs surrounded the place and kept firing. When the army interfered the only thing it could do to stop the fighting and prevent more bloodshed was to ask the Jews to surrender their weapons and equipment, to walk out with their arms above their heads and to be searched on their way out. The Jews could not but accept, as they came out shaking off the dust of death. The Arabs captured 150 mortar and other guns, a ton and half of ammunition, bombs, armoured vehicles, many light weapons as well as first aid and medical equipment. The Jews were transported to Jerusalem in vehicles belonging to the [British] army."

This battle is the biggest blow dealt so far to the Jews, and *the biggest victory achieved by the Arabs. It is worth* recording here that many inhabitants of the neighbouring villages participated in this battle, under the leadership of Ibrahim Abou Diah from Soreif. He advised on the planting of the mines and the erection of strong barricades; he armed those who had no weapons; he deployed his men in every sector; and his orders were obeyed by all, as if he were a great general who had mastered the art of war, with many victorious battles to his name. What made all the peasants from the neighbouring villages respect him and follow his orders was the fact that he was one of them. They knew him the same way he knew them, and they knew he was fighting for the sake of his country and nothing else. He is the first to be seen when death looms, and the first to shun the spoils of war. He shares everything with his men, attends to their needs, eats when they eat and gets hungry if they have nothing to eat. He works and stays awake through the night with them. He treats his men very well, though he is firm at the same time, and will not tolerate negligence. If he appoints one of his men to a nightshift and, upon inspection, finds that man asleep, he immediately expels him from his army — that is, if he does not punish him severely. When it comes to his own duty, he has no rival. He is very young and small in physique, but when the battle is on he is as strong as the strongest of lions. Despite all this, newspapers never mention his name, as if he were the unknown soldier. It was that little-known young man who dictated his conditions to the British Army and whom they had to obey.

Had he been a city boy, or a member of so-and-so's family, they would have waxed lyrical over him, holding parties in his honour, putting huge amounts of money at his disposal. I am afraid that he himself will notice how he is being treated, or that somebody will draw his attention to it, and then we will be *divided, good forbid, into peasants* versus city people, *as has* happened before.

I must also record here that among those who did well in that battle was Kamel Erikat. Some say that it was he who led the battle and that Ibrahim Abou Diah was under his command, but only God knows the truth. Another person who deserves mention here is the Mayor of Rafat, Abou Atta, who oversaw the guarding of Katamon in the absence of Ibrahim Abou Diah. The mayor is highly intelligent, skillful and patriotic. In talking to him one might mistake him for a graduate of the highest academy. He expresses himself in a combination of eloquent speech and mature opinions, and he possesses the strongest resolve. I wish this or that mayor were like him... I even wish a great number of the members of the Supreme Committee, highly educated but illiterate in comparison, could be like that man. I have evidence that he provides Ibrahim Abou Diah with money whenever he is in need. Another man who always responds to the call of duty, and whose name must be recorded here is Abou Fouad Jawdat Al-Amd. In the morning, he works at his shop, and in the evenings he carries his gun and spends all night up among the ranks of the fighters.

Khalil Al-Sakakini, writer and educationalist, fled his home in Jerusalem on the last day of April, 1948. He took refuge in Cairo, where he died five years later and is buried. The extracts above are translated from his book Kaza Ana Y Donia (That is the way I am), published posthumously in 1955.

We welcome letters and contributions on all subjects raised on this page. Material may be edited for length and clarity; it should be addressed to M. Anis, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St., *Cairo*; Fax: +202 578 6089; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Turn right for India

AS THE Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party forms India's new government, women leaders are emerging as the deciding force in the future of the nation. Hindu nationalist leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee was named prime minister of India on Sunday, ending nearly two weeks of political hustling following nationwide elections that left no single party with a clear mandate. The 360 million citizens who voted — some 60 per cent of the total electorate of 600 million — have produced a Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) so tightly balanced that the ensuing political manoeuvres have turned government-making into a sorcerer's delight. Neither of the two big parties in contention — the Congress Party and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — has made the grade on its own, but both were very close to scraping over the halfway mark with the help of standing or prospective allies.

Never has the country seen such a knife-edge result. The situation is so perplexing that speculations on stability have not even begun yet, though at the beginning of the election campaign in January this appeared to be the chief concern in political, business and social circles. With India featuring in so many people's sights these days as a major emerging market, the investing world was also watching with interest.



BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee next to his political partner actress-turned-politician Jjayalalitha Jayaram (photo: AFP)

Clinton in Carter's steps

As Bill Clinton prepares for the first official presidential visit to Africa in 20 years, some wonder if traditional US interventionist policy is ripe for a change, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

On 23 March, United States President Bill Clinton embarks on a landmark African tour. Political observers and economic analysts from around the continent are closely monitoring the developing business and political ties between the richest, most powerful nation in the world and the poorest continent — which today happens to have one of the world's fastest growing economies. Clinton's 12-day tour of Botswana, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda comes at a time when the continent is experiencing unprecedented economic growth — an average of 5 per cent per year.

Clinton is the first US president in 20 years to visit African nations in an official capacity. Former President Jimmy Carter was the first. While president in 1978, Carter visited Liberia and Nigeria — two countries not on Clinton's list.

Carter is widely seen as a champion of the cause of democratisation, peace and reconciliation in Africa. His Carter Centre, based in his home state of Georgia, has since been actively involved in development and conflict-resolution issues in Africa, and he has publicly declared that Africans themselves must set their own timetable for democratisation and political liberalisation. Clinton, too, understands that the momentum for change can only be generated from within the African continent. But, like Carter, Clinton knows that the constructive influence and support of the international community is sorely needed.

Countries on Clinton's itinerary, like Ghana and Uganda, have emerged as crucibles for radical political and economic reform. But even the best performers have serious economic and social woes. Uganda has one of Africa's fastest growing economies, but its efforts at alleviating poverty are being hampered by a crippling debt repayment burden. In Uganda $3 per person is being spent on health while $17 per person goes to repay the country's debt burden.

Grappling with the painful effects of sweeping economic reforms, the southern African nation of Botswana, arguably the continent's most politically stable and longest lasting democracy, has enjoyed a buoyant economy based on diamond mining, commercial beef farming and tourism for over three decades. Clinton's visit to Botswana is, in large part, a tribute to this oasis of political and economic stability in a turbulent region. Clinton's visit to South Africa comes as no surprise, for it would have been inconceivable for the leader of the world's self-styled pre-eminent democracy not to visit the continent's economic powerhouse which also has one of the most vibrant civil societies in Africa.

There are few easy choices if Africa is to realise its undoubted potential, and befriending Clinton's America is by no means one of the continent's easier choices.

Kofi Attor, chairman of Ghana's foreign relations committee, described Clinton's visit as long overdue. Clinton's African tour is a "major shift in American policy," Attor told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Political liberalisation is hard enough, economic reform is an even tougher nut to crack. But changes are under way. The frenzy of post-independent Africa's large-scale projects has given way to more measured objectives. Many of the largest projects have proved to be white elephants, others have virtually shut down. Both in terms of capital requirements and expertise, foreign investment has become a cornerstone in Africa's economic development. Most evident are changes in the pattern and scale of investment.

Clinton's visits to Rwanda and Uganda are perhaps a tacit acknowledgment of what Carter called "the nexus of cross-border ethnic alliances that have evolved" in the war-torn Great Lakes region in the heart of Africa. "The US is now facing an unprecedented leadership role, one that should be carefully considered and based on a new understanding and a more sustained interest in the [Great Lakes] region. This role must far exceed and be more constructive than that of the few opportunistic US corporations that have rushed into rebel-held areas in search of lucrative mineral deals with little regard for the future of [Congo], its environment or its people," Carter told reporters last year.

"No place matters more in Africa than the Great Lakes," added US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright during her own African tour three months ago. The Great Lakes region lies at the crossroads, linking northern and southern Africa. It also shelters the sources of the River Nile.

Back in 1978, there were few countries on the African continent that Carter could visit officially without raising eyebrows in Washington and in European capitals. Francophone Africa was off-limits, being jealously guarded by Paris. South Africa was an international pariah state, its African majority struggling to end apartheid and institute democratic reforms. Today, most of the dictators are gone. The new leaders, even though still uncomfortable with Western-style democracy, are committed to democratisation and political liberalisation.

It is in this context that Africans would like to believe that American military escapades in the Africa of yesteryear are truly over. It was not so long ago that American troops were propping up ruthless dictators like Zaire's former strongman Mobutu Sese Seku on the pretext of defending the region against Communism.

Washington's ironies and poignancies do not always wash in Africa. The Clinton administration's peculiar brand of liberal political correctness does not always go down well in a continent where nothing is quite black and white. The humiliating experience of America's Somali debacle, where dead American troops were dragged naked through the streets of Mogadishu, is still fresh in people's memories. Washington's heavy-handed backlash and economic embargo against Libya, a key economic player in many desperately poor parts of Africa, is widely condemned across the continent.

Is a tectonic shift in America's policy towards Africa under way? Perhaps not, for Washington is still intransigent when it comes to questions like sanctions against Libya and Sudan. Until very recently, America was considered a neophyte on the African political scene. France and other former colonial powers with extensive interests in Africa have had their nemesis on the continent that was once their exclusive domain. America holds the keys to two of Africa's main economic motors: trade and investment.

America, too, is making promising overtures. US Congressmen ended a tour of Africa late last year which took them to Botswana, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire. The 50-member delegation was led by Congressman Charles Rangel of Harlem, New York. Rangel, one of America's most prominent AfricanAmerican politicians, co-authored the African Growth and Opportunity Bill, which is working its way through Congress and is expected to be passed before Clinton actually arrives on African soil. The bill is designed to eliminate tariffs on African textile imports, to grant trade preferences to African exporters and to facilitate free trade agreements, joint business ventures and the development of African transport, telecommunications and infrastructural networks. It is also designed to improve African nations' access to the US market, debt reduction and eventually free-trade agreements. But the bill, if passed, will be conditional on African countries implementing good government, refraining from human rights violations and investing in human resources, Rangel told reporters.

However, Clinton confidant Vernon Jordan, one of the most influential AfricanAmericans in Washington today, told reporters at an investment conference in the Ethiopian capital last week that only countries instituting political and free-market economic reforms will be eligible for trade partnerships with America. Assistant US Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice made similar statements stressing that preferential trade is conditional.



Diana revisited

Even Mohamed El-Fayed is ready to admit that the crash that killed Dodi and Diana might have been just an accident, writes **Safa Haeri** in Paris

Until 12 March, Egyptian millionaire, Mohamed El-Fayed was 99.99 per cent certain that the tragic car accident on 31 August 1997, which killed both his son Dodi and his girlfriend Diana, Princess of Wales, was the result of an international conspiracy. This conspiracy theory, popular throughout the Arab world, implicated the French, American and British intelligence services plus Israel's Mossad in plotting to prevent the Egyptian playboy from marrying the woman who would one day become the Queen Mother of one of the world's oldest dynasties.

But after hearing Judge Herve Stephan, who is investigating the case, explain for two long hours to him the result of six months of investigations — including the minute-by-minute reconstruction of the last two hours of the life of the legendary couple — the owner of the Harrods department store in London and the Ritz Hotel in Paris, had changed his mind. "This [explanation] may be a possibility," he told the crowd of journalists and photographers outside the court.

El-Fayed stuck to the conviction that the pursuit by a horde of more than 30 paparazzi of the Mercedes 280 which was carrying the couple at speeds of more than 250 kilometres was the main cause of the accident. But the investigation has also concluded that the driver, Henri Paul, was drunk, that he used to take anti-depressive drugs such as Prozac, that he did not possess the special licence which is compulsory for driving that category of car in France and that he was driving five times faster than the authorised speed limit.

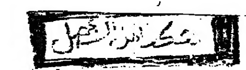
Dressed in a chic grey suit, wearing a white shirt and a green tie, El-Fayed looked serene and composed when he entered the tiny office of Judge Stephen in the Justice Ministry not by a secret door, as he was supposed to, but from the main entrance. "In all my life, I had never seen that many photographers. I even did not know that there existed so many of them. Now I do realise what paparazzi means," said a ministry guard.

"The meeting was conclusive. It was important that El-Fayed meets the investigating judge and hear from him first-hand what caused the accident and what were the facts and the findings so far. He is satisfied and has congratulated both the investigating judge and the detectives. However, we would like to see a new search be carried out concerning a white Fiat Uno," Georges Kiejman, El-Fayed's French lawyer, told the tabloid *Le Parisien*.

Eyewitnesses have reported seeing a white Fiat Uno in the Alma tunnel at the time the Mercedes crashed into one of the tunnel's pillars. Fragments of a red rear light belonging to that kind of Italian-made car have been found at the scene of the crash, and some suspect that photographers may have laid an ambush there to force the car to stop in order to take pictures.

A former justice minister himself, Kiejman said both he and his client wanted the detectives to find out what happened to the Fiat Uno. "What is confusing is that one of the two cars had been immediately repaired the morning of the accident and the other had been scraped after the accident," he said, reiterating that he considers the chase by photographers as the "principal reason" for the accident.

"This explains the speed and the itinerary taken by the driver," said the lawyer. However, he acknowledged that the high level of alcohol in the driver's blood could have also played a role.



Three controversial bills before PA

Three new draft laws, recently submitted by the government to the People's Assembly, have drawn fire from members of the ruling National Democratic Party. **Gamal Essam El-Din** investigates

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri was forced to intervene recently to tone down criticism directed by members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) at three new draft laws submitted to the People's Assembly last week. The first draft law aims at transforming the Arab Republic of Egypt National Telecommunications Organisation (ARENTO) into a joint stock company in order to make it eligible for privatisation on the stock market. As a result, Law 153 of 1980, which is currently regulating ARENTO's performance, would be annulled while ARENTO would be called Telecom Egypt, regulated by Law 159 of 1981. According to Transport Minister Soliman Metwalli, the capital of Telecom Egypt Company would amount to the net value of ARENTO's assets and then be divided into nominal shares, with the value of each ranging from LE100 to LE1,000. Metwalli said the objective of this unprecedented legislative move was to privatise 20 per cent of Telecom Egypt's shares for an estimated LE20 billion. "The government sorely needs this amount to raise the efficiency of telecommunication services in Egypt, to shorten the waiting list for new telephone lines and to extend telephone services to rural areas and new industrial communities," Metwalli said. However, workers' representatives in the PA insisted that privatising the strategic sector of telecommunications will not only jeopardise the national security of Egypt but will lead to the sacking of many ARENTO employees. Metwalli, however, emphasised that none of ARENTO's employees will be dismissed. "They will even get higher benefits. As for national security, I emphasise that the telecommunication sector is under the government's full and firm control. Besides, the government is determined to keep its majority stake in Telecom Egypt," Metwalli said.

The second draft law before the PA is an amendment of Law 12 of 1976 regulating the performance of the Egyptian Electricity Authority (EEA). EEA, according to the bill, will also be transformed into a joint stock company, to be privatised later on the stock market. As a result, eight electricity distribution companies, currently affiliated to the Holding Company for Construction and Electricity Distribution, will be transferred to the jurisdiction of the EEA. According to Electricity Minister Maher Abaza, the new bill is aimed at integrating electricity services and selling a tranche of shares, ranging from 10 to 20 per cent of EEA's shares on the stock market to generate additional revenues necessary for the renovation and maintenance works of electricity distribution companies. This legislative amendment, Abaza said, also gives the EEA the right to establish new joint stock companies and invites businessmen to subscribe to them. But a number of MPs expressed concern that the new bill could lead to a rise in the cost of electricity that would be unaffordable to people with limited income. MPs also charged that the new legislative move would create "a state of tension and confusion" in labour circles due to the expected negative impact privatisation would have in the future. In response, Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid stated that turning ARENTO and the EEA into joint stock companies was part of a new government strategy aimed at turning 43 government-owned organisations into joint stock companies. The objective, he said, is to upgrade their performance and boost their profits, while maintaining the rights of their employees and relieving the state budget of their financial burden.

The third bill would create equality and transparency in the process of awarding bidding contracts. The bill, which is an amendment of Law 9 of 1983, is called "The Regulation of the Bidding Procedures Law." It is aimed primarily at updating legislation in line with recent international developments in project implementation. The bill also seeks to eliminate bureaucratic red tape faced by public sector agencies and private entrepreneurs when submitting bids and tender offers. According to its explanatory note, the bill is also aimed at giving public and private contractors equal opportunity in implementing projects. "The present system is discriminatory against the private sector because government agencies are always instructed to grant contracts to public firms, regardless of how efficient they really are," said the note. Some MPs argued that the bill will leave the local contracting market prey to giant foreign multinational corporations. Two MPs, Mahmoud Ali Hassan, chairman of the Housing Committee, and businessman Talaat Mustafa, the committee's deputy chairman, decided to submit a rival bill aimed at giving private Egyptian firms a larger role in undertaking national projects.

Customs rebates

THE CUSTOMS Authority has recently announced new measures to facilitate the tax rebate system and to increase the number of kinds of goods subject to the system.

Egyptian customs departments have begun to implement the tax rebate system on 786 types of goods. The new system involves the refunding of customs duties paid on materials which are used in manufacturing exported products. Each of the 786 products carries a fixed amount of predetermined duty, which will be repaid immediately upon exportation.

The tax rebate system was previously known as the "drawback" system. Bakr Halaw, head of Port Said customs department, said that with the drawback system there were complicated procedures which the exporter had to complete before receiving his money. "By implementing the new system we are trying to eliminate such procedures and so encourage Egyptian exports."

According to the finance minister's Decree 665 for 1997, a joint committee has been formed, including representatives from the Customs Authority, the ministries of industry and trade, the Federation of Industries and chambers of commerce, to follow up on the implementation of the new system.

Raising the price of money

Both the banking sector and the market are struggling to come to terms with the effects of a new law which seeks to close off a loophole in the tax system. **Sherine Abdel-Razek** reports

Bankers and market experts say that Law 5 of 1998, an amendment to Tax Law 157 of 1981, is not only vague, but has been rushed through at the wrong time. Yet this wave of criticism does not overturn the consensus that it was necessary to deal with the loophole in the taxation system that was allowing banks and companies simultaneously to raise their profits and lower their tax payments.

Previously, banks and companies could borrow substantial sums of money, in the form of deposits for the former and bank loans for the latter, and then deduct the interest as expenses from their taxable income. At the same time the funds borrowed could be invested in treasury bills and bonds, the income from which is also tax-exempt. This meant in effect that these institutions enjoyed a double tax exemption, borrowing money free of charge and then placing it in tax-free investments. The new law corrects this situation, by taxing all bank and company revenues from treasury bills and bonds.

Minister of Finance Mohieddin El-Gharib said that the new law is a necessary correction to the taxation system, redirecting money that was previously being lost to the government so that it can be used for investment and development projects. But the business community is far from happy with the changes.

"The amendment will definitely close a loophole in the tax system, but the bad timing and the vagueness are causing a lot of uncertainty," said Mohamed Ozalp, senior general manager at Misr International Bank.

Ozalp said that the government should have given the business community prior notice before passing the law so they could prepare for the consequences of its implementation.

Also, Ozalp believes that the law comes at an unfavourable time for a market that is already reeling from a number of other blows. "The market has been stagnant for a long time as a result of the Luxor attack, the plunge in the Southeast Asian markets and the Iraqi problem."

"The law is also quite vague," said Ozalp. "Any new law should stipulate all the details necessary for its implementation, but so far its terms are unclear and nobody fully understands it," he said. "It is hard to assess the likely effect of the law on bank operations and profits." Experts believe that banks are more likely to suffer than companies, if only because of the size of their investments in treasury bills. The figures published by the Central Bank of Egypt show that banks currently own about 80 per cent of all Egyptian treasury bills, with an annual tax-free income of LE 1.7 billion. Now that this income is taxable, banks are expected to bear tax payments of LE700 million on their investment. EFG-Hermes, an Egyptian investment banking firm, has estimated the decline in banks' profits will range between 20-30 per cent.

But bankers say the banking system is already paying a steep, though indirect, price for the new law. The value of bank shares dropped sharply following the amendment, as did the value of the banks' Global Depository Receipts (GDRs) which are traded on foreign stock exchanges.

Market experts say a recent plunge in demand for treasury bonds has been another of the law's repercussions. Amr Elkadi, head of EFG-Hermes' research department, pointed out that before the new law institutional investors used to rush to buy treasury bonds because the income from them was tax-exempt. "Now that they have been deprived of this advantage, the bonds will not be attractive any more," Elkadi said. Without the tax exemptions, treasury bonds, with an annual interest rate of 8.8 per cent, are less attractive than other investments, he added.

Elkadi believes that in the long run this situation will have to be resolved either by lowering bank interest rates or by increasing the rates on treasury bonds to bring back the institutional investors. Otherwise, Elkadi said, the cost of borrowing from the government will, implausibly, be higher than the cost of borrowing from the banks.

Aid and progress

US AMBASSADOR to Egypt Daniel Kurtzer has said that the expected reduction of US economic assistance to Egypt will be congruent with the economic progress attained by Egypt and with the increasing concentration on investment and trade between Egypt and the US. Speaking at a press conference last week, Kurtzer said that talks between Egypt and the US on the reduction of economic assistance will begin in five months and that the Egyptian government is currently formulating proposals for the gradual decrease in aid. He added that he hoped to see an increase in the activities of American companies and investments in Egypt since the Egyptian government has provided a climate conducive to investment.

Market Report

Upward trend continues

FOR THE second consecutive week the capital market went upward, closing at 374.4, during the week ending 12 March and gaining 3.59 points.

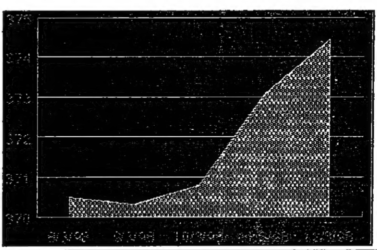
All market sector indices fared well during the week. Egypt Gas transactions accounted for 10.54 per cent of the overall market turnover of LE353 million. A total of LE37.2 million worth of its shares changed hands, ending at the same opening level of LE324.

Mohandes Insurance Company cornered 12.81 per cent of market transactions in terms of number of shares, 701,812, traded through the week.

The Islamic International Company for Real Estate Investments was the market's biggest gainer, ending at LE29.74 with a 21.4 per cent increase. Giza and South Cairo Mills and Bakeries suffered the highest loss in share prices, 9.87 per cent, to close at LE40.85.

The market is waiting for the opening of subscriptions in the Egyptian Car Industries (Jack) bonds. The LE50 million offering is the company's first. The issued bonds are non-convertible, meaning they cannot be transferred to shares, and will be offered at a minimum subscription price of one bond for LE1,000. While its 1997 results are unavailable, Jack posted profits of LE7.3 million in 1996 compared to LE1.4 million the previous year. The company said that the bond aims at increasing its production capacity, especially after having acquired the manufacturing rights to Mitsubishi cars.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Al-Ahram Weekly

Campaigning for terror

Over the past two weeks, Israel has given the world nothing new: merely supplementary evidence of its intransigence and determination to prevent a revival of the peace process, now teetering on the verge of total collapse. Top Israeli officials rejected British suggestions for ways to break the year-long deadlock in negotiations with the Palestinians. The rejection came even before British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook arrived in the Middle East on Monday, bringing proposals that have been fully backed by the 15-member European Union. Britain is currently at the head of the EU. The proposals include a "substantial and credible" Israeli troop withdrawal from the West Bank, a moratorium on Israeli settlement construction in the Occupied Territories and stepped-up security measures by the Palestinian Authority. Israeli officials claimed that the proposals favoured the Palestinians and that Europe was not qualified to mediate in the peace process.

The irony of it all was that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu had just returned home from a European tour during which he trumpeted his respect for the Oslo Accords — a truly unique demonstration of his duplicity. As President Hosni Mubarak has repeatedly said, for Netanyahu, words are one thing, deeds quite another.

In another attack on Cook, Israel objected vehemently to his visit to Jebel Abu Ghneim, where a new Israeli settlement is being built. Cook said the visit to the site was intended to underline opposition to Israel's settlement-building. It was Netanyahu's decision to start work there last March that brought the peace talks grinding to their present halt.

In yet another blow to the peace process, Israel publicly engaged in what Foreign Minister Amr Moussa has called state terrorism. In a television interview last weekend, Israeli Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon said Israel would pursue its attempts to assassinate Khaled Misha'al, head of the politburo of the Palestinian organisation Hamas. Israeli secret service agents botched an attempt to kill Misha'al in Jordan last September, triggering a serious crisis in relations with King Hussein's government. Sharon's threat is bound to increase Palestinian bitterness — and will almost certainly lead to retaliation by Hamas.

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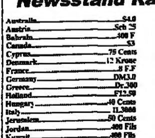
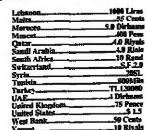
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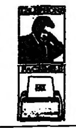
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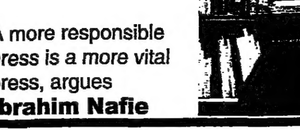
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Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	10 Riyals





Freedom and anarchy

A more responsible press is a more vital press, argues **Ibrahim Nafie**



I was shocked when some of my colleagues depicted the meeting President Hosni Mubarak held with the Supreme Press Council as "a new assault on the freedom of the press." Some of them even accused me of contributing an attack of my own with my recent article on the relationship between press freedom and investment. I find this allegation most painful, *especially since, throughout my entire career, I* have advocated precisely those freedoms without which newspapers become no more than organs of state propaganda, leaving citizens prey to deception and misinformation.

When I served as chairman of the Press Syndicate I saw my primary function as defending the freedom of the press with all available means. The contention over Law 93 for 1995 was not the first battle I engaged in towards this end, *nor will it be the last.*

I am more disturbed, however, by the sense that there is an increasing tendency to interpret recent developments regarding the Egyptian press as an impending crisis, replete with threats of newspaper closures and a clampdown on freedom of expression. I cannot find a single shred of evidence to support such fears. Not only is President Mubarak deeply committed to the freedom of the press, but I also firmly believe that the Egyptian press has only to free itself of certain flaws in order to embark on a new phase of vitality.

It is commonly believed that freedom is the antithesis of tyranny. This is not entirely accurate. The antithesis of tyranny is anarchy — the absence of all authority, a state in which every individual or group retains for themselves the exclusive right to act as they wish. Society, under these circumstances, is atomised and embroiled in a perpetual state of internal warfare. Freedom, thus, is not only antithetical to tyranny but also to anarchy. It is contingent upon that sense of duty with which individuals should arm themselves for the preservation of society.

As not all societies enjoy the same level of development and progress, the degree of responsibility shouldered by pundits of opinion is in direct proportion to the gravity of the challenges particular societies face. Thus, what may appear as the ultimate indicator of freedom in one country may constitute a frivolous inversion of priorities and an intellectual luxury in another. In the Third World, where the challenges are inherently more complex and grave, a threshold of responsibility is indispensable for the preservation of true freedom. The path to hell is forever paved with good intentions. Similarly, the paths to chaos and tyranny are paved with the disregard for intellectual responsibility. My greatest fear is that, in our focus on freedom of expression, we will overlook, perhaps out of the best intentions, the essential precondition of freedom.

This responsibility is compounded for the Egyptian journalist in light of the influence of the Egyptian press within the greater Arab context. Amidst the panoply of newspapers published throughout the Arab world as well as Arabic language newspapers published abroad, Egypt's newspapers continue to occupy centre stage. Our newspapers need only give voice to a contentious issue and the entire Arab world joins the ensuing debate.

For over a century an uninterrupted chain of Egyptian writers and intellectuals have engaged in intellectual, literary and political battles. Their names have reverberated throughout the Arab world. Nor would the Egyptian press have been able to maintain its status without the wide margin of freedom of opinion and expression enjoyed over the last two decades.

It is no coincidence that the contents of the Egyptian press provide essential fodder for the newspapers *of other Arab countries, not to* mention their television and radio programming. Egypt no longer has anything to hide. On the contrary, it is motivated by the certainty that only by exposing its problems will it be able to achieve growth and prosperity.

However, we must admit that the Egyptian press is in peril if we do not confront the threat to it with the necessary courage and resolve. And this time the threat does not emanate from antagonists to the freedom of the press, but rather from those who blur the boundary between freedom and anarchy, who believe that freedom of opinion absolves them of all responsibility. They make the freedom of the press their byword for the pursuit of sensationalism, scandal, slander and religious intolerance. Such yellow journalism is entirely inappropriate in a country that still has critical priorities, among which are the maintenance of national unity, the fight against poverty and the pursuit of economic and social development, particularly at a time of such brutal competition in the international marketplace.

As the scope of freedom of expression increased over the past years, sensationalism in the press has become rampant. In its initial phase, this style of journalism was viewed in a positive light. It provided a forum for a new generation of journalists, for new and original modes of journalistic expression, and for a forum of political opposition essential to a democratic system. As it developed, however, the trend proved very disappointing. The Egyptian readership could no longer find answers to their most urgent questions or constructive contributions to national issues.

It may be argued that ultimately those newspapers that abide by professional ethical codes of conduct survive, while the yellow press dies a slow death as a form of entertainment for commuters. Still, for a country such as Egypt, it is a shame to see potential journalistic talent go to waste when it could be engaged in issues of a more compelling nature confronting our nation. Moreover, it is disturbing to contemplate the consequences of the confusion engendered by sensationalism and misinformation during such a delicate phase of transition. I am particularly alarmed by the spectre of the loss of the credibility of the Egyptian press and the effect that this will have on its intellectual and moral status in the Arab world.

Once again, however, I must stress that we should not turn a blind eye to corruption. I appeal only for the simplest conditions of responsible journalism: careful checking of facts, a rejection of mudslinging, a respect for the right of individuals before the courts to be presumed innocent and other such integral ethical considerations.

The aim of our efforts in the Supreme Press Council and the Press Syndicate is no more than to bring Egyptian journalism back on track, in accordance with existing laws that, for one reason or another, have not been enforced properly, leading to the rupture in the bond between freedom and responsibility. The Egyptian press is not in a crisis, as some have claimed. Freedom of opinion and expression is not in peril. What has happened is that the institutions responsible for the conduct of the press have begun to engage in the exercise of their duties, a process which I am convinced will contribute to a more vital and creative national press.

Water shortage [1]

A conference held today in Paris on worldwide water shortage could prove to be fundamental for the future of the Middle East. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses the issue

An international conference on the theme of Water and Sustainable Development convenes today at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, in response to the invitation extended by French President Jacques Chirac in his address to the Second Earth Summit held in New York last June. The summit failed to make significant headway on many of the issues on its agenda, particularly on how to protect the biodiversity *that is so vital for the survival of the human species.* Because of the urgency of the deteriorating water situation worldwide, Chirac's initiative was widely welcomed.

Warning that human consumption of drinking water doubles every twenty years, Chirac painted a frightening picture of the steady depletion of this vital resource. In the year 2000 the water available for consumption in Africa will be one fourth of what it was in 1950; in Asia and Latin *America, one third.*

Today's UNESCO conference was preceded last month by a preparatory meeting, also in Paris, of experts who laid down a number of guidelines for the conference, such as rationalising and optimising the use of available water resources, developing sustained systems for monitoring water resources and use, mobilising new financial resources from both the public and private sectors, vocational training, and, last *but not least, the pricing of water.*

While pricing water might be compatible with the policies of GATT, it would certainly be detrimental to the poor countries of the South. Of course, these countries could invoke their sovereign prerogatives to refuse implementing such a policy. But as water becomes ever more scarce, it will inevitably be subject to the law of supply and demand and even the countries most resistant to the idea may eventually find themselves forced to comply.

It is significant that the rich countries oppose the principle of pricing when it is they who will have to foot the bill, while enthusiastically endorsing it when most of the burden will be borne by the poor countries. It is now recognised that the future survival of the human race will depend to a large extent on its ability to build up gene banks of alternative strains to such crops as wheat and maize, which are gradually being devitalised through over-farming. Most of these gene banks are derived from the wide diversity of plants in tropical countries with poor populations whose main source of sustenance is such crops. If gene banks are to be preserved for the future of the human race, the rich countries have every interest in dis*couraging the depletion of crops now often* consumed as food. However, this would entail subsidising the populations in one form or another, that is, pricing biodiversity, a cost no rich country is ready to assume, despite their cheerful readiness to consider pricing water.

The commodification of water is the inevitable consequence of water scarcity, and can only be avoided if potable water becomes abundant. But this would require more than just *rationalising its use.* It *would require,* in fact, nothing less than the creation of new sources of water, whether by conventional or non-conventional means; to begin with, by making the cost of desalinating sea water economically viable. This should not be impossible at a time Man is accomplishing such remarkable feats as placing Pathfinder on Mars and cloning mammals. The transnational pooling of scientific resources and findings is now an accepted practice in domains touching on the well-being of humans, such as AIDS and cancer research. No one can dispute the importance of water for the very survival of the human race. After the startling accomplishments of genetic engineering, the time has come for what can be described as 'ecological engineering' aimed at subordinating the features of geography to the needs of man, with a view to making deserts obsolete before the end of the 21st century.

The only countries which have been successful so far in desalinating sea water are the oil-rich Arab Gulf states, whose wealth allows them to resort to expensive present-day technology in this field (approximately one dollar to desalinate one cubic metre of sea water). For this practice to be generalised, the cost should go down substantially, which might require adopting wholly new technological approaches to the problem than the ones now applied.

To give one example, it has recently been discovered that the strange weather patterns collectively ascribed to El Niño are, to some extent, the result of man-made ecological disorders which have got out of control. An area *of the Pacific, larger than the United States, has* been overheated, thus intensifying evaporation and obstructing the normal direction of winds. The consequence has been diluvian rains on coastal areas that previously suffered from desertification and vice-versa, i.e., shortage of water in places which previously enjoyed heavy rain. Can science restore human control over this man-made disorder now adversely affecting humankind?

Egypt is *well placed to host a research centre* for the desalination of sea water and the development of other non-conventional means to overcome water scarcity. On the one hand, it could put together an endowment that would pool Arab financial potentialities in this field along the lines of Jean Monnet's European project of Coal and Steel. A substantial reduction in the cost of potable water, which is now exorbitant throughout the oil-rich Gulf area, would be beneficial to all concerned. On the other hand, Egypt could convince France, the initiator of the conference on scarcity of water, to play a key role in mobilising worldwide scientific and technological know-how in the field. This could be an outstanding achievement in the year France is celebrating the bicentennial of Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt. By making the backbone of the anniversary an emancipatory act of this magnitude, France would dissipate apprehensions among members of the Egyptian intelligentsia that the celebrations carry neo-colonialist connotations.

All parties are bound to win from such a project, but what might prove to be its most striking effect is the impact it could have on the peace process in the Middle East — an issue to be addressed in the next article in this series.

Faithful lives

By Naguib Mahfouz

Religion is an intrinsic, inherent part of Egyptians' lives. Since all the characters in my novels are ordinary Egyptians, they reflect this religious sense. For my characters, as for people in this country, faith is very present in daily life, whether through the call to prayer or through the many edifices constructed to the greater glory of God which line the streets on which they live. It is difficult not to think about eternity when one is surrounded on all sides by buildings erected to proclaim the piety of Egypt's rulers, or to do good in preparation for the afterlife.

By religion, I do not mean the beliefs that give rise to violent political movements. These movements see violence as a means to achieve the ends they seek — specifically, access to political power. I, on the other hand, perceive religion as a noble and sublime faith which leads men to virtue, and guides them to moral behaviour, not a system of belief which prompts them to commit acts of violence and shed the blood of innocent people. Religion is a driving force in advancement and progress since, in essence, it is the belief in God Almighty, the Creator, and exhorts humans to enter into direct communion with Him. Human beings draw from God the help they need to go on living, bearing the sufferings and tribulations it inflicts and overcoming the many obstacles that arise on the path from the cradle to the grave.

One of the characters in my trilogy, who diligently sought the essence of religion, is called "Kamal" (perfection). But now I cannot tell whether the name was a way of labelling his pursuit of sublime truth or not. Some of the words a writer puts on paper may be the results of unconscious impulses, rather than the products of conscious deliberation.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Reviewing press ethics

Al-Shaab: "Has the American threat to intervene in Egypt's affairs in defence of Copts reached such levels that it should close down one newspaper and possibly a magazine? Will this help the press to carry out its role in exposing corruption? Will this reassure journalists or will it turn into terror? If the influence of the businessmen is so great, will this lead to condoning the behaviour of some businessmen who are mentioned in the *statement accusing Coptic businessmen which was published in Al-Destour* and *Rose El-Youssef*?"
(Gamal Asaad, 13 March)

Al-Wafd: "There is nothing wrong about the press these days. It is strong and carries out its duty to guide and criticise — without a censor. As for press freedom, it has its champions who know its value and how to defend it. Those who fought against the press assassination law of 1995 are still alive and are prepared to do battle once again if the freedom of the press is threatened. But they would not be prepared to fight for the freedom of the yellow press. Yes, we will fight for freedom, democracy, justice and human rights but not in order to raise yellow flags dotted with pieces of women's underwear!"
(Gamal Badawi, 12 March)

Al-Gomhuria: "Whenever governments seek to curb press freedom, the inevitable happens: human rights or*ganisations the world over rally in protest,* Congressional committees fume with rage and the new world order is aghast. All this generates fear that these governments want to return to the days of closed-door economic policies, nationalisation, sequestration, detention camps, when corruption was abetted and centres of power fostered. Worse, the relevant Congressional aid committee threatens to review its economic and military aid so that investors will shy away, tourists will vanish, political and social tension will increase and terrorism will rear its ugly head."
(Salah Eissa, 12 March)

Al-Ahali: "Probably the most important point in the statement issued by the heads of political parties on the freedom of the press is the suggestion that the press syndicate should call for a national conference to defend press freedom and uphold the ethics of the profession. This would be attended by journalists, representatives of political parties, the Shura Council, the Supreme Press Council, lecturers at information and *press faculties and famous writers,* as well as trade unions since an attack on public freedom is not confined to the freedom of the press."
(Farida El-Naqash, 11 March)

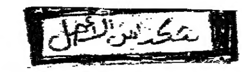
Al-Ahram: "After President Mubarak's directives to the Supreme Press Council to take the necessary measures to free the Egyptian press of deviations and protect it against a new mafia, it would be indeed a shame if the state did not support the council in its quest to protect democracy and freedom of the press and uphold its good name in the Arab region."
(Dr Abdel-Azim Ramadan, 14 March)

Al-Mussawar: "We are in dire need of a serious review of press ethics in order to entrench the traditions of the profession and protect it against negative trends. This is the role of the Press Syndicate which grants licences to journalists and can take punitive measures, when needed, if the syndicate's prime responsibility is the protection of freedom of the press. Its other responsibility, no less important, is to uphold the ethics of the profession and protect it from harmful practices which may tarnish the image of the press. In this, public opinion stands with the syndicate in opposing the incorrect practices of some in the press."
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 13 March)

Compiled by **Galal Nassar**



It was most pleasant to draw Indonesian President Suharto's face: the broad smile, high cheekbones, the triangular cap. When he laughs, his eyes are crinkled almost shut: perhaps a head of state must not see too clearly if he is to laugh. He is a young man at almost 80, recently re-elected for a seventh term; and I see his face, all jolly circles and heart-shaped nose, as clear and straight-forward: despite the apparent complexity of the lines which outline his features, there are almost no intersections or blurred marks here.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Only sympathy

Minister of Foreign Affairs Amr Moussa has sought to calm the flurry of false expectations prompted by Robin Cook's visit to the region. Cook brought an "initiative" for peace in the Middle East. Yet Arafat has been asserting that the peace process is "at death's door". Moussa explained that the British foreign minister is only suggesting certain "ideas", which will never coerce Israel into changing its policies. All the same, we thank him for his sympathy.

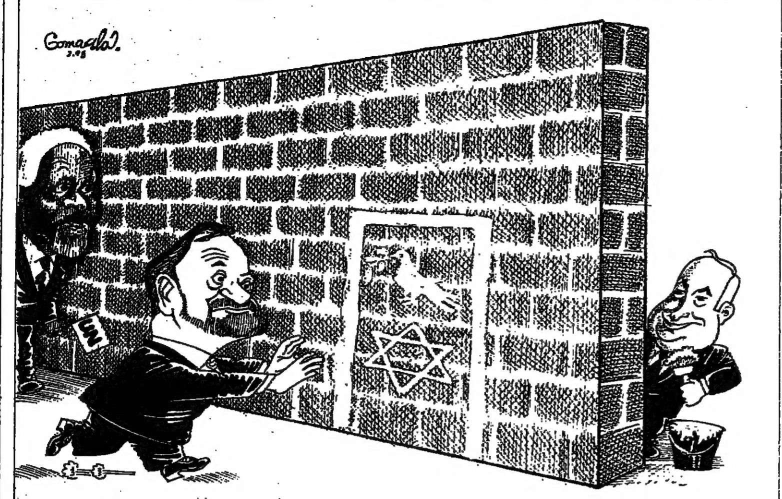
Before his arrival in the Middle East, Cook made a number of lengthy statements to the press, including one to *Al-Ahram*. He touched upon the suggestions and policies relevant to Britain's opinion of Israeli and Palestinian actions. He disclosed that the European Union had already approved three suggestions and was ready to throw its weight behind them, in a bid to get the peace process rolling again. He made no mention, however, of the tactics he could employ to persuade Israel to change its aggressive policies or to comply with previous commitments concerning withdrawal, the freeze on the construction of new settlements, safe passage from Gaza to the West Bank, or the building of the airport — or, for that matter, with any of the commitments elaborately enshrined in the Oslo Accords, which Arafat still carries in his pocket.

Cook, on his appointment to office a few months ago, recommended the adoption of a "moral foreign policy". He may not recall, as he sets foot on the soil of Jerusalem, that it was a compatriot of his, a certain Balfour, who had promised to create a "homeland in Palestine for the Jews", back in 1917. That promise instigated the tragedy of the displacement of the Palestinian people, carried out in order to appease world Zionism. But Britain, having sowed hostility and contention at the beginning of the century, no longer possesses the means to implement its own policy, despite its position today at the head of the European Union, an alliance always interested in observing all the events taking place in the region, but never to the point of becoming involved or taking a stance that could anger Israel, let alone one that would compel it to abide by its international obligations as set out in relevant UN resolutions.

For Arab capitals, it has become repetitious, not to say boring: every six months or so, a European dignitary from the state which happens to be chairing the EU for that particular term comes to visit. From representatives of the smallest member, Luxembourg, to representatives of the largest — France, Britain and Germany — all have come bearing fresh hopes and promises that the peace process will be reactivated imminently. None have anything concrete to propose. The solution to the Middle East problem is in the hands of the US alone. In other words, Europe's role is merely to rubber-stamp Washington's decisions.

Mr Cook is no exception to this rule. It was this fact that drove Netanyahu to inform the Europeans that they have little understanding of the Middle East crisis, whereas the Americans are masters at the game. Revealingly, Washington has yet to table a single suggestion or new idea on how to revive the peace process in the Middle East.

The only adventure Robin Cook could encounter during his tour of the region is on his visit to the new Jewish settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim in the company of Faisal Al-Husseini, since Britain objects to the construction of settlements in Jerusalem. The Israelis are against such a visit, but they are prepared to tolerate it since it is largely symbolic. More importantly, it is inconsequential, particularly in the wake of the espionage operation in London, the failed attempt to assassinate Khaled Mesha'al in Jordan, and the most recent scandal in Switzerland. This is, indeed, a propitious time for Israel.



Soapbox

Full freedom, complete truth

The central issue in the current debate on freedom of the press is how to strike a balance between individual and collective freedoms.

When President Hosni Mubarak met with the Supreme Press Council, he reaffirmed the importance of upholding the freedom of the press so that it can fully and effectively perform its political and social functions. He specifically urged members of the press to expose corruption, criticise the government and expose social ills. In pursuing these aims, *the press should enjoy complete freedom, as long as* the information it provides is true. As for freedom of opinion, President Mubarak stressed, it should be unrestricted.

Freedom, however, requires a degree of maturity. In democratic countries, newspapers and journalists are held accountable if they deliberately publish false information. Clear lines are drawn between criticism and slander, and defamation or inciting to racial hatred is illegal.

Rather than seeking to narrow the scope of press freedoms in Egypt, therefore, the current dialogue aims to preserve and protect these freedoms. Journalists must double-check their information before articles go to press. If some journalists transgress the codes of their profession, they should be compelled to apologise and correct their claims. This is the meaning of the freedom we strive for and seek to protect: freedom of the press, with guarantees for the individual. It is a balance that cannot be imposed by government measures. The responsibility for striking this balance should rest squarely in the hands of the Press Council and the Press Syndicate.



This week's Soapbox speaker is the chairman of Dar Al-Maaref publishing house and editor-in-chief of October *magazine.*

Ragab El-Banna

Out of the battlefield, into the battle

This chapter of the Iraq conflict may have been closed, but the book is far from done. **Amin Hewedy** examines options for war and peace

Protagonists and observers alike heaved a sigh of intense relief when Kofi Annan signed the memorandum of understanding with Iraq. The relief was even greater when Security Council Resolution 1154 passed unanimously, unhampered by the now customary US veto. Exercising this right to veto resolutions unilaterally seems to have become one of the basic props of US policy in the implementation of its hegemonic aspirations. Politically, Washington imposes selective international legality by slamming Security Council resolutions. Militarily, it mobilises its air, naval and land forces in crisis spots.

US strategy focuses only on conflicts which threaten its interests and objectives, following the principle that these threats must be dealt with before they get "out of control". The use of force is the most important aspect of this strategy. For instance, the US avoided intervening directly in any of Africa's bloody conflicts, because these crises can be managed by proxy — by remote control. The US finds it safer to manage the crisis from a distance, having learned its lesson in Somalia. The same principle was applied after Desert Storm, when Iran took over three islands in the Arabian Gulf. The US forces assembled nearby looked on impassively, although the Gulf countries had welcomed US soldiers and were storing US military equipment, and despite the fact that these islands belonged to one of the US's Arab allies. Patterns of alliance and enmity count little in the US world view. Only US interests count.

The US has found it difficult to swallow Security Council Resolution 1154. The cause of its dissatisfaction lies not only in the way in which the matter was settled, under pressure from a number of countries, nor even in the reaction of the Arab or American public. The US was frustrated because it could not carry out a military attack on Iraq on the scale it desired.

In this climate, we must admit that Resolution 1154 does not mean the crisis has been defused. The explosion is likely to happen at any time. But several questions need to be answered before we are able to determine the factors that will trigger it. Who, for instance, will give the green light for US and British arsenals in the Gulf region to start bombing Iraq? What can prompt the "allied forces" to cross the red lines defined by Resolution 1154?

No agreement on the first question was reached among the members of the Security Council. Debates took place. The words seemed rhetorical, but in fact they were precise, extremely important when placed in context, and clearly indicative of the protagonists' intentions. If the Iraqi regime did not comply with the Security Council resolution, the members wondered, should it face "severe", "very severe" or "the severest" consequences? The Council opted for the last expression. But what does it really mean? According to the US, the term implies that it has acquired the authority to use force against Iraq. Britain backs this interpretation, since "the severest consequences" can include the use of military force — the most drastic way of ensuring compliance. The other permanent members of the Security Council disagreed with this interpretation. The US ultimately agreed to consult with the other permanent members before attacking Iraq. This, again, was viewed as a concession — a sign of weakness. Yet it was enveloped in ambiguity to achieve deterrence through doubt. This concession, furthermore, was merely verbal. US troops are still in place, ready for action. This means that the crisis has not yet been defused. Ambiguity served to conceal Clinton's apparent defeat. Again, does this interpretation seem probable?

Perhaps the second question will shed more light on this issue. We may compare Resolution 1154 with Resolution 242, which, after more than 30 years, still gives rise to debate as to its exact meaning. In the case of Resolution 242, the ambiguity resides in the difference between the English and French versions. Thus, in English, no definite article precedes the reference to "occupied territories"; in French, the phrasing implies that the resolution applies to all the territories occupied by Israel. The pursuit of politics without force thus renders the destinies of entire nations dependent on a few letters of the alphabet.

Security Council Resolution 1154, based on the memorandum of understanding between Kofi Annan and Saddam Hussein, marked the end of a phase in which the crisis had teetered at the edge of an abyss. One step forward on either side would have triggered a military conflagration. The resolution, therefore, may have defused the crisis; but implementing the resolution itself is another story entirely. The US is still capable of delivering the first strike whenever and however it chooses, because the other party lacks the power of deterrence and the capability of inflicting retaliatory measures. Moreover, the US does not respect international legality. It has already threatened to take action by itself, if and when it deems fit.

The fact that the process of searching for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction has taken seven years suggests that politics, rather than technical matters, are at issue here. For the sake of comparison, we could cite the Lockerbie case, which led to the imposition of sanctions on Libya for the purpose of achieving certain objectives other than those declared.

Richard Butler, the head of the UN weapons inspection team, commenced his work by failing to respect the neutrality which he should have observed. He further aggravated matters by alleging that Iraq could wipe out a city like Tel Aviv with the weapons of mass destruction it is concealing. Under his command, there were and still are inspectors who have controversial records.

To aggravate the situation, the inspections were being carried out without a defined time limit. Thus, there seemed to be no light at the end of the tunnel. Article 20 of Resolution 687 stipulates that sanctions will be lifted when Iraq is declared free of weapons of mass destruction and the inspections are completed. Article 7 of the memorandum of understanding also holds out a vague hope that the sanctions will ultimately be lifted. The group formed pursuant to this memorandum comprises members of the UNSCOM team, representatives of the International Atomic Energy Authority, and some diplomats. This means that American and British diplomats have been excluded, since diplomatic relations are severed between Iraq and both the US and Britain. This new team, however, had to wait two weeks before beginning work. Since this would be sufficient time for Iraq to conceal any documents or materials concerning prohibited weapons inside the eight presidential sites, the object of forming that team seems to have been to confirm the UN's right to enter any site which is to be searched, rather than to ensure compliance with technical procedures. Richard Butler has demanded that this team's reports be submitted to him before being passed on to the relevant authorities.

Moreover, the UN secretary-general has appointed a personal representative in Baghdad, who is supposed to act on his behalf, but who holds no authority over the inspection teams. His role will be limited to liaising with the Iraqi leadership and the UN secretariat. He will not intervene to resolve any problems relating to the inspections or the implementation of the oil-for-food deal.

In this perspective, the situation is escalating once more, albeit in subtle, gradual ways. Matters were aggravated, for example, when the Russian ambassador to the UN asked that a Russian assistant to Richard Butler be appointed. Bill Richardson hastened to rule out that proposal. Kofi Annan delayed discussing this proposal; after meeting President Clinton, Annan stated, "there is no need for the proposed appointment".

Therefore, where are the red lines, and who controls them? These points remain ambiguous. More forces are being shipped to the Gulf; the US administration remains angry and ready to strike. At the same time, it refuses to pay its back dues to the UN, and continues to dominate the international organisation by using its right of veto irrationally and arbitrarily.

While the two questions posed above seem to have no clear answers, therefore, in the final analysis the US will give the go-ahead, and will impose its own restrictions. This means that three strategies are possible: an attempt may be made to implement political objectives through pressure. This scenario, however, cannot be tested until Iraq returns to the international fold. Furthermore, such a defusing of the situation requires that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict be resolved.

A second possibility is for the US to attack Iraq in a few weeks. It is impossible to maintain such a high-level military presence for a long period. The US's real objective, of course, is not only to destroy Iraq's weapons, but also to destroy Iraq's potential altogether.

A third possibility is an attack after the final reports have been submitted. This option may necessitate a temporary redeployment of forces, and the improvement of relations with Iran.

The Arabs must be prepared for all these possibilities. However daunting US military force may seem, and however pre-determined we may feel the outcome of this conflict to be, the fact remains that the Arabs must exercise their own political will, to protect their own specific interests.

The writer is a former minister of defence and former chief of General Intelligence.

Could Europe produce Middle East peace?

This week, the EU announced its plan for peace. **John Whitbeck** discusses the steps it can take to make real changes in the region

It is widely assumed that, with its UN Security Council veto and its stranglehold on the so-called Middle East "peace process", the United States can continue indefinitely to prevent not just the achievement of peace, but any serious progress toward peace, and that the rest of the world is powerless. Understandably, this produces a sense of hopelessness and despair. The rest of the world, however, is not powerless. All that is lacking is political will and the courage to pay more than lip service to international law.

In 1956, when Britain, France and Israel, three of America's closest friends, invaded Egypt, President Eisenhower demanded their immediate withdrawal, threatening sanctions. At least then, it was not a question of who was doing it to whom, as it has been more recently, when Iraq invaded Iran, Israel invades Lebanon or Turkey invades Iraq. At least then, there were fundamental principles of international law and conduct which had to be respected.

In 1967, Israel conquered and occupied portions of the territory of all of its neighbours except Lebanon (an omission which it has since rectified), America cheered and the long, downhill slide in America's respect for international law began. Repeatedly over the past three decades, the United States has found itself on the short end of 14-1 votes in the Security Council and 160-2 votes in the General Assembly, standing alone in support of behaviour which the rest of the world recognises as constituting gross and unequivocal violations of the Geneva conventions and international law generally.

While most Americans may not notice or care, those who make American government policy can, at the psychological and intellectual level, have only two possible reactions to America's choice to consistently oppose the rest of humanity on fundamental issues of international law and human rights. First, they can accept that America has become an "outlaw" state — or, perhaps, a "rogue" state, to use the splendidly subjective epithet which America now pins on those countries it doesn't like. Second, they can tell themselves that international law is simply not to be taken seriously in the real world, at least by those sufficiently powerful to ignore it. The second alternative must be the psychologically more acceptable one. In any event, it is the one which seems to have been adopted.

By the 1980s, America was mining Nicaragua's harbours (and ignoring the International Court of Justice's condemnation of it for doing so), bombing Libyan cities and invading Grenada and Panama for reasons so flimsy that it is difficult today to remember what they were. When the US Congress passed a law requiring the closing of the Palestinian Mission to the UN in New York, in flagrant violation of the UN Headquarters Agreement, the legal adviser to the State Department even produced a legal opinion to the effect that subsequent US domestic legislation takes precedence over prior ratified treaties — which is a very subtle nuance away from telling the rest of the world that the United states does not consider itself bound by the treaties to which it is a party.

The ongoing refusal of the United States to pay the massive arrears in its UN dues and assessments, which constitute a legally binding treaty obligation toward 184 other countries, is consistent with the letter and spirit of this legal opinion and reflects a contempt for international law so broadly absorbed into the American world view that it barely elicits comment in the United States. In the same spirit, the Clinton administration has been trying (unsuccessfully) to obtain the cancellation of 50 years of UN resolutions on Palestinian rights and Middle East peace, on the grounds that, with Israelis and Palestinians now talking to each other, international law is no longer relevant or helpful. Put simply, might makes right.

Europeans, on the other hand, still tend to view international law as having an important role to play in making the world a better place. When they join the rest of the world in opposing Israel and the United States at the United Nations, it is not because they dislike Israelis and Americans (quite the contrary), but because they believe it is important to affirm and support basic principles of international law and human rights, and to take a clear position for right against wrong and for justice against injustice.

Yet, at least until now, they have seen their role as ending there. When, in effect, Israel and America spit in their faces and do as they please, the Europeans turn the other cheek, returning on the next occasion to steadfastly affirm what international law requires — and to be rebuffed yet again. It is a process which ultimately diminishes respect for the very principles of international law which the Europeans seek to affirm.

Europe's problem is not powerlessness. It carries on substantially more trade with Israel than does the United States, and Israel's participation in European events as diverse as the European soccer championships and the annual Eurovision song contest provides significant psychological comfort to Israelis who still feel isolated in their geographical region. Europe's problem is political will, but, in the new post-Cold War world, European subservience to American dictates should no longer be viewed as a perpetual infirmity.

American Middle East policy, like American foreign policy generally, is a function of American domestic politics and bears no relationship to American "national interests", to the extent that, aside from avoiding nuclear annihilation, American "national interests" (as opposed to the particular interests of particular American special interest groups) can hardly even be said to exist. American politicians, like most human beings, are motivated principally by the desire to remain employed, which requires (or is at least perceived as requiring) not offending any rich and powerful special interest group. While not actively hostile toward Middle East peace, American politicians, from President Clinton on down, rank it in priority well below their personal job security and will always do so.

After much hesitation, the US government opposed apartheid in South Africa and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia because significant domestic constituencies opposed them and few Americans dared to speak out in favour of them. The US government continues to give unstinting support to apartheid and ethnic cleansing in Israel and Palestine because the most powerful of all domestic constituencies supports them and virtually no Americans dare to speak out against them. There is no reason to hope for a Second American Declaration of Independence or for any constructive American role in the Middle East.

For Europe, on the other hand, peace and stability in the Middle East are fundamental national interests. The European Union Call for Peace in the Middle East issued by the heads of state or government of the European Union at their June 1997 Amsterdam summit proclaimed that "the peoples of Europe and the Middle East are linked by a common destiny" and that "peace is possible, necessary and a matter of urgency in the Middle East". They listed "respect for the legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people to decide their own future", "the exchange of land for peace" and "the unacceptability of the annexation of territory by force" among the "foundations of peace". In addition, domestic political pressures which would oppose taking positions consistent with international law, basic principles of human rights and national self-interest are much weaker in Europe than in the United States.

Imagine that the 15 nations of the European Union were to belatedly adopt the Eisenhower Principle and to issue a joint declaration to the effect that, if Israel has not complied with international law and UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 425 and withdrawn to its internationally recognised borders by a specified date (say, six months hence), the European Union would have to consider the imposition of economic sanctions against Israel, including the banning of all aviation links between Israel and the European Union countries.

America's 1997 vetoes supporting Israel's huge new illegal settlement construction at Jebel Abu Ghneim, and opposing Israeli payment of compensation for the Qana massacre, have sent the Netanyahu government the clear message that it can do whatever it wishes, including destroying the world's hopes for Middle East peace, without fear of any adverse consequences. Such a European declaration would send the opposite message with thunderous resonance. It is unlikely that sanctions would ever have to be imposed, since, as in 1956, Israel's politicians could honestly recognise and convincingly explain to their electorate that such a small country cannot refuse to comply with such an ultimatum.

While such a declaration would not make Middle East peace inevitable, it would, overnight, make it likely. By forcing Israel to "do the right thing" and thereby liberating Israelis from the role (so tragic in light of Jewish history) of oppressors and enforcers of injustice, European governments would be showing more genuine concern for the long-term welfare of Israelis than the unthinkingly and abjectly subservient American government. They would also revive respect for international law generally, and for Europe as an independent force in world affairs.

Is this a dream? Is it unimaginable in the real world? Or might Europe finally summon up the political will and the courage of its convictions to utter the words which could produce peace in the Middle East?

The writer is an international lawyer who writes frequently on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Warming up

David Blake watches the "Barber" sisters in a fight without punches

Barber of Seville: Gioacchino Rossini; Cairo Opera Company; Cairo Opera Choir; Cairo Symphony Orchestra. Conductor Allessio Vlad. Director Sandro Sequi. Decor and costumes Giuseppe Crisolini Malatesta. Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 12-15 March.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Rossini was a doll. Everyone loved him. He had style, elegance, wit — he fairly corrugated musical inventive geniuses. He was a plump, benign cherub whose wit flashed like a finely honed sword of Deamocles.

Beethoven, Verdi, Wagner, doted. The cherub let it be known, on his part, that his great loves in music were Bach and Mozart. And his compositions showed this to be the truth.

Beethoven told him to stick to Opera Buffa. Beethoven was wrong. Rossini's great work was done in Opera Seria. He leapt out of the eighteenth century straight into the twentieth, and it has taken this century to discover that he was right about himself.

The Cairo Opera promised four performances of his Buffa masterpiece The Barber, which unhappily they sliced into two. However two barbers are better than none at all, so Cairo was grateful. The two houses were almost full.

The cherub's attractions never fail. Prima donnes love his operas. Though difficult to sing, his music displays voices like objects projected by a crystal prism. There was special excitement on these two nights because the performances introduced two young singers in the *prima donna* role of Rossina. Singing her has launched some of opera's greatest light sopranos. Even Callas took a bite at Rossina, and on the recording she sounds as if she were about to devour the rest of the cast.

Cairo's two prima donnes are Egyptian, both 20 years old and were being given a chance to display their qualities in a new production and decor, and with a conductor to reckon with, Allessio Vlad. Each soprano has her fans and the fans turned up in crowds to barrack and clap at each performance. The sense of rivalry, of battle, added spice to the Barber.

All opera houses have these situations, they're exciting — and fun. They make a break away from the stifling routine that lies in wait for most opera productions. Battles are fun, it's what life is about. Operatic battles are part of the musical scene and when the contestants are beautiful, young and talented sopranos the adrenaline flows and everything fizzes. It is what being a young singer is about, and so youth flowed brightly through this show.

The Barber sisters were having their ball. The fans were totting up points. Everyone is dashing to their seats and the show begins. From the overture with its famous crescendi it was easy to see Maestro Vlad knew his Rossini — speed and more speed. The tenor, Juliano di Filippo as the hero Count Almaviva, was a good, adequate singer. At least he never screamed or sounded stale.

Figaro the baritone has a lot of the best music to sing, did it well and was stylish to look at. The chorus was joyful: no dead wood hanging about in the shadows, they bustled around and sang as real people. The set was simple — slabs of cardboard moved back and forth by balletic harlequins. Everything moved quickly.

The second scene of the first act leaves no time for a warm up for the prima donna. She goes straight into maybe the most sung piece of operatic soprano material ever. It is serviceable music and can be transposed where and when needed. Old sopranos put it into a low mezzo key, young sprightly ones shoot it up into the stratosphere, the high E territory.

Diva one was Dalia Farouk. She's a strong-voiced Rossina and sticks more or less to the written note. She's darkly Spanish to look at and listen to, and for her age assured, with the ability, necessary in Rossini, of keeping her soprano range in the concerted numbers. It was relaxing to listen to her because of her assurance. She has a proper middle voice, so for opera she holds an ace.

Rossini doesn't bother much about plot. There is someone old, Dr Bartolo, and someone young, Rossina, who is fed up with the prospect of marriage to Bartolo and leans towards the wandering minstrel Almaviva. Nothing much happens, it just gets more insane as it races along. What matters is the music and it is done yoeman service through changing musical times since its first production in 1816, after Rossini had written it in three weeks.

Rossini, as he said of himself, was no snail. On stage people drift in and out. In comes the base baritone, Don Basilio, Reda El-Wakil, who sings his crescendo aria about the joys of deception and calumny, with unction and glibness. He is a media man to remember and one who never drifts but flutters around constantly like a distressed partridge. Dr Bartolo, the man who feels he just needs Rossina. The relationship is not as heartless as often performed. In this show Rossina shows a kindly dispassion for the rather pathetic old soul. Claude Rathla does a feeling and sympathetic job as one doomed to be a nuisance about his own house, but shows through the absurdity of it that he knows his own position, which is not as futile as it seems. A knowing old body who is not in the least pathetic.

All the knitting in the story gets raveled into a tight spinning ball buzzing like a top and ends with one of Buffa Operas' glories — the oceanic sextet which grows bigger and ends with a chorus of policemen joining the ensemble which jazzes into a final simple and complex fugue unsurpassed by even Beethoven or Mozart.

Act two is a further fracture in the already crazy contrivances which do for the structure of the plot. Rossini didn't really need plots, merely good, practical coat hangers on which to hang his embroideries.

What really happens is nothing, nothing but the music. So far the notes have been given a ruthless run around. Allessio Vlad wants a continuous spin to the various pieces of the music in the opera.

This act opens with a singing lesson, Rossina being put through further coloratura hoops. In this scene Rossini allows the soprano to sing anything she fancies. Dalia Farouk, who plumps for a present day Rossina, practical, not a shade romantic, sings the original Rossini composition. The voice is smooth, accurate and makes a constant show from the opera stage in all the duets and concerted numbers she sings. It spills over without any trouble, rather worldly, like the Oscar from the *Ballo in Maschera*. Her stage presence is firmly there. She's neither a vague or pert little miss, but a vocally assured and knowing character.

The shaving scene of Bartolo is not given any time for slapstick, mercifully, and no time for comedy. But Bartolo really goes crazy, like the story. The ball of wool unwinds itself as the lovers are united in a happy ending: Bartolo is content and the audience, breathless, with their last chance to reward Dalia Farouk for her professionally carried through performance.

The second and last "Barber" was the same as the first but for the setting of Amira Selim in the centre of the Rossini jewel box.

And so the comparisons begin. There is not much cause for rivalry between the two stars. Their paths do not cross.

Amira Selim is tall, beautiful too, and she has a sort of blonde resonance to her person: she moves well and in this production is rather birdlike. For her Rossina is a lovable character, easy going, nothing grim. She pats old Bartolo very understandingly and without condescension. Never cheeky or pert, easy to see why the fans love her.

And then the problems begin. Amira Selim is an artist, she has musical understanding and presence, and elegance, and a natural sense of the theatre. The voice has strange colours to it. Some sopranos have this: it's useful, can fill large spaces, but Selim's voice at the moment does not take kindly to space. It is a voice so far not of the earth — Mozart's Queen of the Night and Strauss' Daphne. These roles are sung over a large orchestra and always in a big house. She could be Wagner's Forest Bird at present. Time will show what lies ahead for Amira Selim. She and Dalia Farouk need what seem rarest these days: brilliant voice teachers. Grand opera, always being told it's dead, is alive and kicking. Technology breaks but also makes. Who can tell what is in store for these exciting young singers?

At the moment Amira Selim must be careful. She will not always sing before such a kindly disposed audience as she had on this night. Dalia Farouk will be a problem of another sort. She's a butterfly. In about five years' time this little geisha will be an iron butterfly stretcher of throats. The production surrounding these two sopranos is generous and hopeful and the young stars are promising. There's only one thing better than promise for a singer, and that is fulfillment.

Fans and the Cairo Opera House must watch and wait, and help these two.

Make that a Cavafy

Hala Halim skips through the sometimes crowded marmoreal halls

A plump Miss Egypt 1949. Alexandrian artist Seif Wanli at his most roguishly handsome. Greek sailors frolicking in a vineyard — these are a few of the highlights of the photography exhibition "The Greeks of Alexandria" held at the Greek Consulate in Alexandria (until 22 March). It is one of the ironies of this exhibition, though, that it is only when one gets to the third gallery that one comes across such beguiling images.

The photographs in the first two galleries, billed "Recent Photos", are, essentially, Greek Community ones. Admirably photographed by Costa Nasioka and Maria Serghaki, these chart virtually every edifice of the Community — church, school, club, hospital, orphanage, old people's home, cemetery. Something of a pattern emerges as you walk around these first two halls: photo of institution; photo of bust of founder; photo of commemorative marble plaque. They are all here, the dynastic elders — Tossitzas, Mohamed Ali's friend from Cavalla days, who was to become the first head of the Community and founder of one of the first Greek schools; Benachi, who founded the orphanage later to become the Greek Consulate; Kaneskerion of the Kaneskerion orphanage, later to become the elderly people's home, among so many others.



Now no one in their right mind would deny the sheer weight, economic achievements, cultural contributions and long-lasting impact of the Greek Community in Alexandria. Nor is there any disputing the care and organisation that the Community invested in every station of its members' lives. But then, the occasional untidy creeper on the walls of an edifice here, the colourful washing on a line in the background of a monument there, bring out the irony of this section of the exhibition. In seeking to "document" and "frame" the Greek "presence" in Alexandria, through its still extant architectural symbols, these two halls underscore an "absence" and, what with all the marble, leave an unwittingly sepulchral effect.

The signs in these two halls are all in Greek: I could have had no greater fortune than to be escorted through the exhibition by Mr Alexandros Vlakhos, of the Community schools, who patiently translated. How else could I have known of the epithets — Emmanuel Benachi, for example, designated as "Great Benefactor"? Reach me a black olive, you sigh — or, on second thought, make that a Cavafy. And indeed: "...last night I picked up a collection/ of Ptolemaic inscriptions to read./ The plentiful praises and flatteries/ suit everyone. Everyone is brilliant/ glories, mighty, beneficent/ each enterprise of theirs the wisest./ If you talk of the women of that breed, they too/ all the Berenices and Cleopatras, are admirable..." ("Caesarion").

By a felicitous touch, one of the last pictures in the second hall is of the Elite Café and Restaurant which, though not a Community project, continues to do wonders for the Alexandrian-Greek connection through its proprietess, the inimitable Mme Christina. The photograph of the Elite, of course, begs the question why no one seems to have spared a thought for the once-plentiful Greek taverns of Alexandria, those unsung sites of Greek-Egyptian bonhomie. In any case, the Elite makes for a smooth transition into the third gallery where there is fun and partying galore. To many of the exhibition-goers, this was the most successful section, older Alexandrians comparing notes about familiar faces in the photos.

Bust of Penelope Delta-Benachi: portrait of photographer Rittas

The pictures in this last gallery, labeled "Old Photographs", span the life of the Community from about the 1940s to the early 1960s, though some photos are considerably earlier. These were curated by three collectors, Pieretta Diamantopoulou, a history teacher at the Greek school and a regular visitor to the Friday flea market, her colleague Spyros Peleghratis and the head of the Hellenic Foundation for Culture, Asterios Toppis. The vast majority of the photos were taken by the late photographer Rittas. The Greeks always went for their family and passport photos to Rittas' downtown studio, remembers Mme Christina, where there were always pretty girls at the caisse, and more pretty girls in the photos in the vitrine.

A group of photos, from the late '40s to the mid-50s, shows ample, hatted ladies playing cards and a particularly large dinner party at the Greek Club where two elegant men in the foreground cover their faces. These, recalled one Alexandrian veteran, were "the young playboys, the James Deans of their generation" — Khoremi and Nomikos. One Rittas group wedding photograph from the 1940s is of five Greek girls with five uniformed grooms — from the RAF, suggests George Kypreos, who recalls that these hastily planned British-Greek weddings were very much frowned upon by the Community. But the Greek girls who opted for British husbands, he adds, used to shrug off criticism with a saying: "Better a tasteless big white fish from the ocean than tasty Greek barboni or calamaria."

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Gamil Shafiq (Drawings) & **Halim Yacoub** (Sculpture)
Khan El-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 20 March

Mounir El-Shaarani (Calligraphy)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 20 March.

Indian Photographs
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 21 March.

Mohsen Shaalan (Paintings)
Spiro Arts Gallery, 6 Rd 77C, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 351 4362. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 22 March.

The Greeks of Alexandria (Photographs)
General Consulate of Greece in Alexandria, 63, Al-Eskandar Al-Akbar St, Shatby, Alexandria. Daily exc Sun, 4pm-8pm; Sat 10am-1pm. Until 22 March.

Salah Enani (Paintings)
Akhnaton Gallery I, Centre of Art, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swisri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 22 March.
Works under the title Open Buffet.

Giuseppe Crisolini Malatesta
Cairo Opera Gallery, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel (information) 339 8144. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30pm-10pm. Until 22 March.
Theatre set designs by the Italian artist, including those of the Barber of Seville, currently performing at the Opera House.

Maria Adamantidis
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 23 March.
A photographic tour of the Greek establishments in Cairo under the title The Greeks and Cairo: Places of the Heart.

Rehab El-Sadek
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 26 March.
Works under the title Pages From Old Times.

Bernard Guillot
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Main Campus, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 March.
Thirty-one black and white photographs under the title Egypt: A Fertile Land of scenes from the countryside in the Egyptian Delta, capturing qualities of the fellah such as his freedom, his perception, his dignity and his culture of the soil.

Said El-Sadr
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 26 March.

Martin McInally (Paintings)
British Council Gallery, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 8319. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 27 March.

Emid Welsley Mohareb (Paintings)
Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim Al-Dawla St, Selman Basha Sq, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Opening 22 March, 7pm. Daily 10am-1pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 27 March.

Hussein El-Ezabi (Paintings)
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Opening 24 March, 7pm. Daily 9am-9pm. Until the end of the month.

Gerhard Altenbourg (Drawings, wood cuttings, watercolours and lithographs)
Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, 8 Ismail Mohamed St, Zamalek. Daily 10am-2pm & 4pm-7pm. Until 30 March.

Nazeeh Rasheed (Wood Carvings)
Indian Cultural Centre, 23 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3396. Opening 22 March. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 11am-7pm. Until 31 March.

Rabab Nimr
Khan Al-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 3 April.
Works under the title Black: White.

Hazem El-Mestikawy (Sculpture)
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Thur, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Encounter with the artist 24 March, 7pm. Until 8 April.

Fabrizio Clerici
Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Art, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 14 April.
Oils, watercolours, mixed media and lithographs by a surrealist in the tradition of de Chirico.

Maja Fredriksson (Installations)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Opening 25 March, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 12 noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 24 April.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

Animated French Films
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 22 & 24 March, 11am & 7pm.

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
21 March, 7pm: **L'Uomo Delle Stelle.**
22 March, 7pm: **Il Postino.**

Notice:
Some commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday, others every Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Titanic
Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Air Force 1
Renaissance, World Trade Centre, Corniche Al-Nil, Maspero. Tel 580 4039. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Anastasia
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Mr Bean
Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Fire Down Below
El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Fools Rush In
Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Face/Off
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Murder at 1600
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Thur-Sat, midnight show.

Tomorrow Never Dies
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ressala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.

Tamania wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Hysteria
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

DANCE

Ballet Don Quixotte
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. Daily 8pm, until 29 March.
The Bolshoi Theatre of Russia performs.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 4956. 19-21 March, 9pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8132. 23 March, 9pm.
Soloists Rabha El-Helw (soprano), Hassan Kamy (tenor) perform, conducted by Sherif Mohieddin.

Violin and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 21 March, 8pm.
Shamei Rashedov performs.

Egypt Children and Youth Choir 2000
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 22 March, 11am.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 22 March, 8pm.
Compositions by Stravinsky and Strauss, with piano soloist Ahmed Abu Zahra and conductor Ahmed El-Saedi.

Egyptian Musical Youth
Small Hall, Opera House, as above, 24 March, 8pm.

Piano and Violoncello Concert
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 25 March, 8pm.
Performed by Dominique de Williencourt.

THEATRE

Arabic One Act Plays
Wallace Theatre, Greek Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. 25-31 March, 7pm.
Feut Aleina Bokra (Pass By Us Tomorrow) and *Elli Ba'doh* (Next in Line), scripted by Mohamed Salmawy and directed by Laiy Sobh.

Al-Tayeb Wal-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
Al-Salam Theatre, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Alabanda
Al-Ferdous Theatre, Al-Berrah Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Waleieddin, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

LECTURES

Theory and Praxis Revisited
Blue Room, Greek Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. 19 March, 5pm.
Lecture by celebrated German philosopher Juergen Habermas.

The Age of Suspicion
Blue Room, Greek Campus, AUC, as above. 24 March, 7pm.
Lecture by Distinguished Visiting Professor Gabriel Josipovici, professor of English Literature at the School of European Studies and author of 12 novels and over a dozen plays, among other numerous works.

Habermas delivers a lecture today at AUC

Diagnosis of Bilarzia: From Monoconals to Mummies
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 19 March, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Lisette van Liesbout, Leiden University.

The Discovery of The Tomb of an Official from The New Kingdom in Saqqara
Archaeological Association, 6 Mahmoud Mukhtar St, behind the Graeco-Roman Museum, Azarita. 19 March, 6pm.
Lecture by Zahi Hawwas.

Collections from Egyptological Studies of Pisa University
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 19 March, 7pm.
Lecture in Italian, with slides, by Flora Silvano, Pisa University.

Using Computers for The Theban Mapping Project
Room 203, Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5060. 22 March, 5pm.
Lecture by Walton Chan, project architect.

Political Economy of Financial Globalisation
CEDEJ, 14 Dr Abdel-Rahman Al-Sawi St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 24 March, 5pm.
Lecture in Arabic by Salwa Al-'Antari, Cairo University.

Collections from the Egyptian Gregorian Museum of the Vatican
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 24 March, 7pm.
Lecture in Italian, with slides, by Sandro Roccati, University of Rome.

The Contemporary History of Lebanon 1860-1943
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 24 March, 7pm.
Lecture in French by Denise Ammoun, presenting her latest publication.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Gihan Raouf

EXHIBITION space at the **Cairo Atelier** is given over to collage pieces by **Nefert Rumeih**. Whirls, crescents and spirals spill over from one work to the other, indicating that, perhaps, the artist, in the absence of ideas, has addressed herself to the purely decorative.

Bold brush-strokes, saturated colours and an inaccurate perspective typify the landscapes and still-lifes of **Gihan Raouf** recently shown at the **Salama Gallery**.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

The threads of life

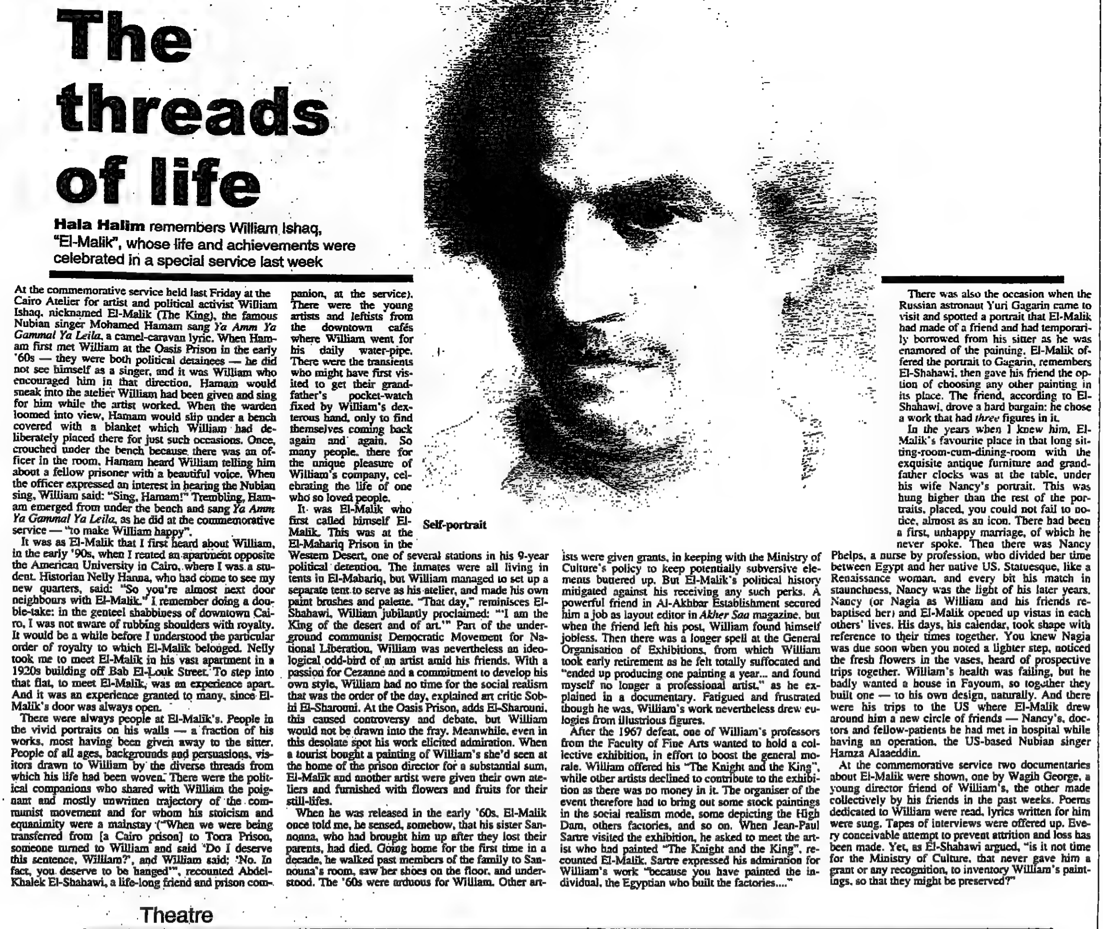
Hala Halim remembers William Ishaq, "El-Malik", whose life and achievements were celebrated in a special service last week

At the commemorative service held last Friday at the Cairo Atelier for artist and political activist William Ishaq, nicknamed El-Malik (The King), the famous Nubian singer Mohamed Hamam sang *Ya Amm Ya Gammal Ya Leila*, a camel-caravan lyric. When Hamam first met William at the Oasis Prison in the early '60s — they were both political detainees — he did not see himself as a singer, and it was William who encouraged him in that direction. Hamam would sneak into the atelier William had been given and sing for him while the artist worked. When the warden loomed into view, Hamam would slip under a bench covered with a blanket which William had deliberately placed there for just such occasions. Once, crouched under the bench because there was an officer in the room, Hamam heard William telling him about a fellow prisoner with a beautiful voice. When the officer expressed an interest in hearing the Nubian sing, William said: "Sing, Hamam!" Trembling, Hamam emerged from under the bench and sang *Ya Amm Ya Gammal Ya Leila*, as he did at the commemorative service — "to make William happy".

It was as El-Malik that I first heard about William, in the early '90s, when I rented an apartment opposite the American University in Cairo, where I was a student. Historian Nelly Hanna, who had come to see my new quarters, said: "So you're almost next door neighbours with El-Malik." I remember doing a double-take: in the genteel shabbiness of downtown Cairo, I was not aware of rubbing shoulders with royalty. It would be a while before I understood the particular order of royalty to which El-Malik belonged. Nelly took me to meet El-Malik in his vast apartment in a 1920s building off Bab El-Louk Street. To step into that flat, to meet El-Malik, was an experience apart. And it was an experience granted to many, since El-Malik's door was always open.

There were always people at El-Malik's. People in the vivid portraits on his walls — a fraction of his works, most having been given away to the sitter. People of all ages, backgrounds and persuasions, visitors drawn to William by the diverse threads from which his life had been woven. There were the political companions who shared with William the poignant and mostly unwritten trajectory of the communist movement and for whom his stoicism and equanimity were a mainstay ("When we were being transferred from [a Cairo prison] to Torra Prison, someone turned to William and said 'Do I deserve this sentence, William?', and William said: 'No. In fact, you deserve to be hanged'", recounted Abdel-Khalek El-Shahawi, a life-long friend and prison companion, at the service). There were the young artists and leftists from the downtown cafés where William went for his daily water-pipe. There were the transients who might have first visited to get their grandfather's pocket-watch fixed by William's dexterous hand, only to find themselves coming back again and again. So many people, there for the unique pleasure of William's company, celebrating the life of one who so loved people.

It was El-Malik who first called himself El-Malik. This was at the El-Mahariq Prison in the Western Desert, one of several stations in his 9-year political detention. The inmates were all living in tents in El-Mahariq, but William managed to set up a separate tent to serve as his atelier, and made his own paint brushes and palette. "That day," reminisces El-Shahawi, William jubilantly proclaimed: "'I am the King of the desert and of art.'" Part of the underground communist Democratic Movement for National Liberation, William was nevertheless an ideological odd-bird of an artist amid his friends. With a passion for Cezanne and a commitment to develop his own style, William had no time for the social realism that was the order of the day, explained art critic Sobhi El-Sharouni. At the Oasis Prison, adds El-Sharouni, this caused controversy and debate, but William would not be drawn into the fray. Meanwhile, even in this desolate spot his work elicited admiration. When a tourist bought a painting of William's she'd seen at the home of the prison director for a substantial sum, El-Malik and another artist were given their own ateliers and furnished with flowers and fruits for their still-lifes.



Self-portrait

When he was released in the early '60s, El-Malik once told me, he sensed, somehow, that his sister Sannonna, who had brought him up after they lost their parents, had died. Going home for the first time in a decade, he walked past members of the family to Sannouna's room, saw her shoes on the floor, and understood. The '60s were arduous for William. Other artists were given grants, in keeping with the Ministry of Culture's policy to keep potentially subversive elements buttered up. But El-Malik's political history mitigated against his receiving any such perks. A powerful friend in Al-Akhbar Establishment secured him a job as layout editor in *Akher Saa* magazine, but when the friend left his post, William found himself jobless. Then there was a longer spell at the General Organisation of Exhibitions, from which William took early retirement as he felt totally suffocated and "ended up producing one painting a year... and found myself no longer a professional artist," as he explained in a documentary. Fatigued and frustrated though he was, William's work nevertheless drew eulogies from illustrious figures.

After the 1967 defeat, one of William's professors from the Faculty of Fine Arts wanted to hold a collective exhibition, in effort to boost the general morale. William offered his "The Knight and the King", while other artists declined to contribute to the exhibition as there was no money in it. The organiser of the event therefore had to bring out some stock paintings in the social realism mode, some depicting the High Dam, others factories, and so on. When Jean-Paul Sartre visited the exhibition, he asked to meet the artist who had painted "The Knight and the King", recounted El-Malik. Sartre expressed his admiration for William's work "because you have painted the individual, the Egyptian who built the factories...."

There was also the occasion when the Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin came to visit and spotted a portrait that El-Malik had made of a friend and had temporarily borrowed from his sitter as he was enamored of the painting. El-Malik offered the portrait to Gagarin, remembers El-Shahawi, then gave his friend the option of choosing any other painting in its place. The friend, according to El-Shahawi, drove a hard bargain: he chose a work that had *three* figures in it.

In the years when I knew him, El-Malik's favourite place in that long sitting-room-cum-dining-room with the exquisite antique furniture and grandfather clocks was at the table, under his wife Nancy's portrait. This was hung higher than the rest of the portraits, placed, you could not fail to notice, almost as an icon. There had been a first, unhappy marriage, of which he never spoke. Then there was Nancy Phelps, a nurse by profession, who divided her time between Egypt and her native US. Statuesque, like a Renaissance woman, and every bit his match in staunchness, Nancy was the light of his later years. Nancy (or Nagia as William and his friends re-baptised her) and El-Malik opened up vistas in each others' lives. His days, his calendar, took shape with reference to their times together. You knew Nagia was due soon when you noted a lighter step, noticed the fresh flowers in the vases, heard of prospective trips together. William's health was failing, but he badly wanted a house in Fayoum, so together they built one — to his own design, naturally. And there were his trips to the US where El-Malik drew around him a new circle of friends — Nancy's, doctors and fellow-patients he had met in hospital while having an operation, the US-based Nubian singer Hamza Alaaeddin.

At the commemorative service two documentaries about El-Malik were shown, one by Wagih George, a young director friend of William's, the other made collectively by his friends in the past weeks. Poems dedicated to William were read, lyrics written for him were sung. Tapes of interviews were offered up. Every conceivable attempt to prevent attrition and loss has been made. Yet, as El-Shahawi argued, "is it not time for the Ministry of Culture, that never gave him a grant or any recognition, to inventory William's paintings, so that they might be preserved?"

Theatre

Into the undiscovered country

Nehad Selaiha slithers into the worlds of myth and fantasy at The National and Al-Hanager

Barring a couple of shows, up until three weeks ago, the current theatrical season offered by the state companies had promised to be dismally dull and boring, with little to capture the imagination or move the spirit. Then *Ya Misafer Wahdak* (Lone Traveller) opened at the National, and *Khafyet Qamar* at Al-Hanager, and suddenly there was an air of excitement. In its last leg, with only one month left, the so far pallid season seemed to shake off its sluggish, pedestrian existence, take on a new life and boldly soar on the wings of poetry.

Interestingly, though not surprisingly perhaps, both productions had the same woman behind them — Hoda Wasfi, director at both venues. For years, and in the face of great opposition, many slanderous campaigns and some very harsh and often unfair criticism, she has assiduously pursued an artistic policy rooted in a deep conviction that the only way to rejuvenate the Egyptian theatre is to continuously inject it with new blood, encourage new talent, restore the missing links between the older and younger generations, question and defy the established concepts and conventions and create scope and opportunities for sharing experiences with foreign and Arab artists. She was the first to introduce and popularise the idea of workshops in the state theatre, to arrange a successful string of them, mostly at Al-Hanager, and to host artists of international renown (such as the Polish director Jozf Szajna, the Austrian Choreographer Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Tony and the Iraqi director Jawad Al-Asadi, to name but a few) to conduct them. She took many risks encouraging new experiments and launching new artists and, naturally, there were disappointments; but her faith has remained unshaken. In the public debate over the future of the Egyptian theatre recently held at The Cairo International Book Fair, she fiercely defended the right of the younger generation of theatre artists to learn by doing and improve through experience, even if they made serious and sometimes costly mistakes. She reminded those present that in the sixties artists like Sa'd Ardash, Karam Metaweh, and Galal El-Sharqawi were given leading posts in the theatre and made heads of companies at the age of 30 or even less; to be given your first opportunity at 50, as sometimes happens now, she added, means that you are finished before you start and that your best creative years are already behind you.

Naturally, not everyone sees eye to eye with Wasfi, particularly the old veterans whom she sometimes intrepidly accuses of wanting to impose a monopoly on theatre. This angers many, and she is sometimes accused of carrying outspokenness to the point of sheer blunt tactlessness. But however much people may disagree with Wasfi, no one can fail to recognise her zeal or respect her passionate commitment. And the last two productions she has sponsored at the National and Al-Hanager (one professional and the other with a cast of amateurs) plainly confirm the wisdom of her policy and vindicate her conviction.

The two productions, though vastly different, are similar in many respects: both are adaptations by their respective directors of well-known literary texts — one a fascinating Egyptian novel by Mohamed Nagui called *Khafyet Qamar* (published by Dar El-Hilal in 1994), and the other the famous, anonymous medieval morality play *Everyman*. In both cases the rewriting goes beyond the mere dramatisation of a narrative in the former or the updating of old material in the latter and becomes a process of deep questioning, re-reading and interpretation of the original text — a process which deftly and quite imaginatively manipulates the rich resources of theatre and its multiple language to project a profoundly intense and personal engagement with the agonising paradoxes of existence on the moral, religious, material and even biological levels.

In the case of Hani Metaweh's *Ya Misafer Wahdak* (the title of a famous song by Mohamed Abdel-Wahab), the straightforward and most unsubtle moral quest of Everyman, the hero of the medieval play, to find someone who would willingly accompany him into the nether world — a quest which yields a series of sad let-downs by all the personified values that presumably support human life and give it meaning, such as love, beauty, friendship, strength, wealth knowledge and family — is transformed into a series of nimble, rapid scenes which mix with disconcerting agility all the known theatrical conventions, blithely blending them together, adding occasionally a generous splash of parody and burlesque in the form of snatches of old songs and movies, and finally creating a crazy, dizzyingly surrealistic and deeply nostalgic potpourri in which fact and fiction, illusion and reality, life, dreams and hallucinations are indistinguishable from each other. But despite its incongruous ingredients, which includes quotations from Descartes and Schopenhauer, Hani Metaweh's strange and exotic brew has a distinct, unmistakable Shakespearean flavour. What holds it together and gives it body and shape are the Bard's twin images of life as both dream and theatrical pageant.

The Shakespearean underlining shows through quite plainly more than once, but especially at the place where Everyman (or Unsi, as he is rechristened in the play) quotes in full Hamlet's famous "To be" soliloquy, stressing his bewildered fear of the dreams that may come in 'that sleep of death' and his dread of the journey into that "undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns."

In the case of Unsi, however, the lone traveller of the title (a self-made rich man, a political writer, and a bit of a womaniser), the return is made possible at the very last minute thanks to the grace and understanding of the angel of death (a seductive blonde, dressed to kill) who allows him a short reprieve to find a companion. But as he journeys back through his former life, it slowly dawns upon him that it has all been a charade — a big illusion. As wealth (delightfully represented by Nohair Amin as a fleshy, vulgar belly-dancer in a heavily sequined gown), knowledge (superbly played by Mukhlis El-Biheery as a doddering, retired professor of philosophy completely gone gaga), strength (farcically impersonated by Munir Makram Wilson as the tottery, delirious owner of a seedy gym, heavily bedecked with knives and guns), beauty, love and friendship (competently played by Yasmin El-Naggar, Reem Izzidin and Zein Nassar) are emptied out of meaning, and life is revealed as a dream, an insubstantial pageant, Unsi becomes more than willing to withdraw into the dreaded, undiscovered country. The fact that his parents forgive him his long neglect and welcome his return like the prodigal son, or that Hassanat (Good Deeds), the beggar whom he had earlier saved from the clutches of her thuggish master just before he was shot at his wedding by some mysterious gang, does not lighten the sense of desolation that envelops the end. The certain, overtly moral tone of the final monologue and its simple, comforting message are undercut and enveloped by an anguished sense of uncertainty as to the reality of anything. In the penultimate scene, the angel of death (Nada Basyouni) openly orders the stage hands to quickly change the set and prepare for the final scene, and perform a cabaret number while they are doing it. One expects a view of the other world; instead, we find ourselves with Everyman and Good Deeds in a shadowy, eerie railway station, with angels on skates with wire wings, and many of the characters flitting by, in and out, like phantoms. At the back, we dimly glimpse the silhouette of a train, waiting, then Nada Basyouni proceeds, slowly and mournfully, to draw the stage curtain closed. I remembered Prospero's "those our actors were only spirits and are melted into air" and did not want to stay and applaud. It is the kind of ending after which the auditorium lights should be dimmed and the audience withdraw quietly.



But how could one leave without telling Nur El-Sherif what a really magnificent *presence* he is. I hesitate to use the word actor because for him acting comes as naturally as breathing. Though a star, and a super one, he glided through the show like a benign spirit, never pushing himself forward, never upstaging anybody, and always helping everyone to give their best. Like a maestro, he wanted his players to perform with all the zest and vigour they could command while carefully orchestrating them to preserve the delicate balance between the varied moods of the play and its total effect.

In Sameh Mahran's dramatisation of Nagui's *Kafyet Qamar* (a complex title with a play on words which refers to a real place where a woman called Qamar disappeared, a cursed spot where a female demon waylays men and snatches them underground, and an eclipse of the moon), the patriarchal system, with all its religious, economic and sexual assumptions, is exposed and subjected to a thorough, ruthless critique. This is not new to Mahran's work. In his previous plays and adaptations of novels for the stage (Yeha El-Taher Abdullah's *The Necklace and the Bracelet* and Abdel-Hakim Qasim's *The Seven Days of Man*), he shows a strong, almost obsessive preoccupation with tracing the socio-economic organisations and the mytho-historical contexts that generate the cultural and moral categories of gender and govern social behaviour, mental attitudes and value systems. To Nagui's convoluted myth (narrated in different versions by a deranged alcoholic to his drunken pub mates in the brief periods he manages to escape from his mental hospital) — a myth which centres on the genealogy of the narrator, the reality of the reported adultery of his mother, and the crazy claim of his sick father that he was the one that bore and gave birth to him — Mahran adds in corroboration the Greek myth of Zeus who swallowed his wife Metis to gain her power of reproduction.

I do not know if the play made any sense to those who had not read the novel. But judging by the response of the audience the night I saw it, it definitely provided a satisfying, visually innovative, often very funny theatrical experience. It meant that in his first venture as director, and though working mostly with amateurs, Mahran had passed the test and got his credentials. It also meant that Hoda Wasfi was right when she decided to take the risk and spend money to give him his chance.

Plain Talk

I am not a great admirer of Ezra Pound. Memories of his support for Mussolini and his racist attitude have always kept me from reading even his Cantos, let alone other works. But recently I found myself compelled to read one of his books, almost a booklet, called *ABC of Reading*. I must admit, having placed my prejudices on one side, that I cannot help but admit that this book is a jewel.

As its title suggests, it is a handbook for those, as the author puts it, "who might like to learn. The book is not addressed to those who have arrived at full knowledge of the subject without knowing the facts."

The book is addressed to both pupils and teachers, with tests at the end of every topic. I would like to start towards the end of the book where Pound gives advice to teachers.

"The teacher or lecturer is a danger. He very seldom recognises the nature of his position. The lecturer is a man who must talk for an hour." Pound believes that it is difficult to have enough words to fill 40, let alone 60, minutes and that the person who really knows his subject can convey his knowledge in a few words.

No teacher has failed because of a lack of knowledge. Teachers fail because they cannot handle a class. If the teacher is slow of wit, Pound says, he may well be terrified by students whose minds move more quickly than his own. "But he would be better advised to use the lively pupil for scout work, to exploit the quicker eye or subtle ear as a look out or listening post."

Going through the book one comes across what can be regarded as epigrams. "There is no reason why the same man should like the same book at eighteen and at forty-eight." There are many such statements which reflect the way Pound's mind worked.

This book reflects his care and reverence for books. Pound compares a general statement to "a cheque drawn on a bank. Its value depends on what *is there to meet it. If Mr* Rockefeller draws a cheque for a million dollars, it is good. If I draw one for a million it is a joke, a hoax, it has no value. If it is taken seriously, the writing of it becomes a criminal act." And what applies to a cheque applies to knowledge. "You cannot accept a stranger's cheque without reference. In writing, a man's name is his reference. He has, after a time, credit. The verbal manifestation on any bank cheque is very much like that on any other. Your cheque if good means ultimately the delivery of something you want. An abstract or general statement is good if it be ultimately found to correspond to facts."

I can go on quoting words of wisdom from the book. But the section I really like is that where he proposes books that are essential for those who want to learn. These are the minimum that a man would have to read if he hoped to know what a given new book was worth.

"I mean he would know whether a given pole-vault was remarkably high, or a given tennis player at all likely to play in a Davis *Cup match*."

He starts with Sappho, then he explains why he made that choice. "Having read it," he says, "you will be told there is nothing better." Then there is Chaucer, followed by Gavin Douglas, Golding and Marlowe. Then comes Shakespeare "in division". The sonnets, when Shakespeare was characterising his craft, the lyrics where he was learning "from Italian song books in which the words were printed with music," and the plays, especially the series of history plays, which form the true English history as distinct from "the bastard epic, the imitation, the constructed counterfeit."

I cannot really give the book its due. In spite of its small size it contains so much in the way of gentle direction as to what a cultured man or woman should read. It is a list for all times and, I should add, for all races.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Vying for supremacy

Following the 17th week of league football action, Ahli remained on top but Zamalek narrowed the gap

A rejuvenated Zamalek side beat Alexandria's Ittihad 1-0 this week, edging to within six points of Ahli, the league leaders. Trying to erase the memory of its early exit from the cup, Zamalek left Alexandria with three valuable points, putting it in third place with 34 points and within striking range of the pace-setters. **Abeer Anwar** reports.

Zamalek's Dutch coach Ruud Kroll, still forced to experiment with young faces, found the right mix against Ittihad, attacking all the way while the Alexandrians were obviously playing for a tie. But defender Medhat Abdel-Hadi dashed any Ittihad hopes of gaining a point, soaring high to head what proved to be the winning goal in extra time of the first half.

In the second half, it was Zamalek's turn to play defence and only some fine saves from African Cup hero Nader El-Sayed kept Ittihad from scoring at least the equalizer.

Following the match, Kroll admitted he didn't think he was going to win. "I didn't expect it but the players are doing their best to try to catch up with Ahli," Kroll said.

Ahli, on the other hand, was only too happy to oblige, drawing 1-1 with cup champions Masri. The Port Said team had beaten Ahli in the semi-finals of the cup last month in a game that saw Ahli incredibly miss four consecutive penalties while Masri went on to capture the trophy for the first time in its history.

Obviously, Ahli was keen on revenge and drew first blood thanks to an 18-metre bullet by newcomer Sayed Abdel-Hafeez from just outside the penalty area that left Masri's goalkeeper no chance. But added Ahli pressure failed to translate into more goals and it paid the price. In the 73rd minute, Tamer El-Nahas' near point-blank shot, from a well-placed right corner pass, ricocheted off Ahli's crossbar and into the goalmouth for the tying goal.

Said Reiner Tsobel, Ahli's new German coach, "The team drew because the players were tired and their physical fitness was not up to standard." After the match, Ahli filed a complaint with the Egyptian Football Federation against referee Reda El-Beltagy, who red-carded star defender Samir Kammouna for dissent late in the second half.

It was the fourth draw for Ahli this year, coupled with 12 wins and just one loss.

In other games, in Aswan, the Arab Contractors escaped with three away points, scraping by Aswan 1-0. The lone goal was scored by Mustafa Marei in the 39th minute. Arab Contractors now have 32 points and Aswan 16.

Mansoura restored some lost pride after a series of embarrassing losses, edging Suez 1-0. Emad Salama scored in extra time to raise Mansoura's points tally to 20 while Suez remained with a respectable 22. Mehalla beat Qena 1-0 in Suez, sending relegation-threatened Qena to the bottom of the table with 13 points. Shams came back from a 0-2 deficit to tie with Ghazl El-Suez 2-2 in the last three minutes of the game. Dina beat Minya 3-1 and, with 15 points, managed to claw its way up from the bottom of the table. Ismaili kept its championship hopes alive, blanking Baladiat El-Mehalla 2-0. Ismaili and Zamalek share the same number of points but Ismaili leads on goal difference. Damietta defeated Sharqia 3-0 and Marrikh beat Port Fouad 2-0 to round out the week.



Ahli drawing with Masri — *photo: Mohamed Wassim*

Diplomats play ball

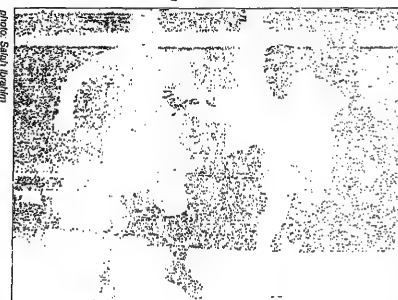


photo: Salah Ibrahim

If you want to get away from the politics, the tensions, the conference tables and the desk work, if you want to promote friendship and security between nations, if you want a good time but are still somehow hooked on that competitive beggar-your-neighbour feeling — in short, if you want to take on the opposition but this time with no risk of being recalled to London, Rabat or Buenos Aires for a cross that falls too short or an ill-judged backpass, if you want all the thrills and spills of international relations without even the remotest risk of war breaking out — where better to be than the Cairo Embassies Five-a-Side Football Friendly?

This year 24 countries are represented at the Ahli indoor hall, an increase on last year's record of 16.

"Our goal last year was to increase friendship with Egyptians, even though there were no Egyptians playing," said Ashraf Adham, championship coordinator, who has obviously been trained in the Kenny Dalglish School of International Diplomacy. "The different nationalities are represented by their envoys to Egypt," he continued. "Our goal this time is to promote tourism, and get the warm loving feeling of the Egyptians put across in the right way." It would seem that Adham has also been attending *the Alan Shearer School of Personal Relationship Management (star pupil:* Keith Gillespie).

The vehicles of that warm loving feeling this year include the Comoro Islands, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Bahrain, the United States, Sudan, Russia, Cameroon, China, Italy, France, Turkey, Syria, Germany, Morocco, Argentina and Somalia. Also represented are the Arab League and Egypt, in the form of a team from the Foreign Ministry.

The golden goalie

26-year-old Nader El-Sayed ensured Egypt kept a virtually clean sheet in Burkina Faso, and walked off with the accolade of best goalkeeper on the continent. **Abeer Anwar** talks to the man with glue on his hands

It was a surprise beyond his wildest dreams when Nader El-Sayed, Zamalek's goalkeeper, was named the best goalkeeper in Africa. "I never thought about it, because I kept focused on one thing: that Egypt had to win. I forgot all about myself," Nader said. It is this spirit of selfless determination that united the whole team and brought them the trophy. The players were not looking to win fame or to show off their own individual skills. All they wanted to do was to win the cup for the Egyptian fans.

Before it was announced that Nader would keep Egypt's goal, there had been strong competition for the job between him, Essam El-Hadri and Ahmed Saber. Right up till the last minute, Fekry Salah, *the goalkeepers' coach, was unable to choose* between the three because they were all very good. "The three were training hard as they all wanted to have the chance to represent Egypt in the African Nations Cup and play a part in their team's victory," Salah commented. *Finally he settled on* Nader, who had improved a great deal in training. After acting as substitute to El-Hadri in both the African Nations qualifying rounds and the friendly tournament in South Korea, Nader had regained his self-confidence and shown he was match fit once again. He had also impressed Mahmoud El-Gohary, the technical manager of the national team, who was heard to say, "Nader El-Sayed is the calmest goalkeeper I have ever seen."

This calmness was the secret of his success. As he himself said, "If I lose my temper, I won't be able to block the shots." Facing Ivory Coast on a penalty shootout, it was thanks to a save from Nader that Egypt made it through to the quarter-finals. "It is one shot I will never forget," the goalkeeper remarked. But how does he do it? For Nader, even penalties are simple: "A goalkeeper has to be calm enough and concentrate well enough to be able to keep his eye on the ball."

Although he was not nominated for the title, Nader was in effect up against Burkina Faso's Ibrahim Diara and South Africa's Badaian Balawi for the award.

Nader *not only won the title,* he was also in excellent shape, and has since received a number of offers to join clubs in France, Belgium and England. "They are all verbal offers, so I have not made up my mind about any of them, but if they do materialise I will *study all of them carefully* and choose the best. I am not looking for the most money, but for the place where I will learn and gain the most experience." Nader added that he will also have to obtain Zamalek's agreement before going professional, although he does not have a contract with Zamalek. But as he says, "This is the club where I have been trained and its coaches have given me a lot, so the least I can do is to say thank you."

Praying to win

AUSTRIA is leaving no stone unturned as it heads into the World Cup. Carrying the red-and-white striped Austrian flag, Beppo Mauhart, the president of the Austrian Soccer Federation, and coach Herbert Prohaska, went over the hills and through the woods to pray at the shrine at Maria Loretto. At the end of the pilgrimage to the Black Madonna of Maria Loretto, the men gave thanks for Austria's World Cup qualification and asked the Black Madonna to bring the team luck this summer.

Kanu's first

NWANKWO Kanu, whose full recovery from heart surgery is key to Nigeria's World Cup hopes, scored his first Italian league goal for Inter Milan last week. The forward scored in the 73rd minute on a close-in shot as Inter won 4-0 over Atlanta of Bergamo. He entered as a substitute six minutes into the second half. Kanu was greeted with a *two-minute standing ovation* by the 40,000 crowd at San Siro Stadium. He underwent surgery for a deformed heart valve at the Cleveland Clinic in November 1996, three months after leading Nigeria to the gold medal at the Atlanta Olympics. The lanky 21-year-old, his comeback slowed by a series of leg injuries, made his Italian league 11 February.

Blood letter

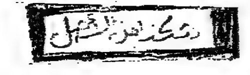
LOVING a sport to the extent that a fan spilled his blood to cheer his team in the World Cup is something to add to the eccentricities *of sports.* A Romanian soccer fan has written a letter using his own blood, explaining why he wants to watch Romania compete in the World Cup.

"I wanted to speak for all inflamed soccer fans in my country," Constantin Talpau told the daily *National* newspaper. "I was thinking about sailors, sick people and military personnel who won't be able to attend," he said. "Soccer is my life. Come on Romania. We will die and be resurrected with soccer," wrote Talpau in a letter to a soft drinks company running a competition, with tickets to the World Cup in France this summer as the prize. Talpau is tipped as one of the lucky winners. But results have not been announced, so he *doesn't know if he* spilled his blood in vain.

Soccer song

SENEGALESE singer Youssou N'Dour, a pop giant in his west African homeland, has recorded the official World Cup anthem. N'Dour, 38, told *Le Parisien* daily that he had been crazy about soccer since he was a little boy growing up in Dakar, the capital of Senegal. It's not the first time that N'Dour has composed a song with soccer in mind. Thirteen years ago, he wrote a song called *The Lions* for the Senegalese national team. This year's World Cup song is entitled *La Cour des Grands* — The Court of the Great.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**



Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



To Egyptians, the name Saad Zaghloul is a byword for nationalism and patriotism. Zaghloul led a nationalist uprising against British occupation in 1919. It did not succeed in getting the British out, but it was the first shot in a long and bitter struggle that Gamal Abdel-Nasser crowned in 1954 with an agreement for British withdrawal. In this instalment of his *Diwan* series, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story of a court suit filed by Zaghloul against Ismail Abaza, a prominent politician with close links to the royal palace. Abaza had written in *Al-Ahram* two articles which Zaghloul regarded as slanderous. Zaghloul won the case.

Illustration: Makram Henein

In the spring of 1912, *Al-Ahram* found itself party to a dramatic court case. On 6 April it had featured a letter from one of its readers, entitled "The truth about the resignation of Saad Pasha." The letter was signed "Aref", a pseudonym that in Arabic means "I know". The subject in question was none other than Saad Zaghloul, who would eventually become the leader of the 1919 Revolution, though at the time of this letter he had just resigned from his post as minister of justice.

So intimate was Aref's awareness of the circumstances of Zaghloul's resignation, that a contemporary reader might have suspected that the writer was Zaghloul himself. Certainly the contents of the letter piqued the readers' curiosity as to his true identity, which only the editors of *Al-Ahram* could have known. They would not have published his letter without knowing his identity beforehand. Also, even if they agreed not to divulge his name, they would do so if required by a court, which is precisely what occurred only a few days after the letter was published.

The story began two months previously when rumours first started circulating of Zaghloul's intention to resign. "He feels that he is not in harmony with his colleagues and other senior officials," commented *Al-Ahram*. Some newspapers suggested that he was "too firm and resolute, traits that the court system is in dire need of."

Aref refuted this notion. The ex-minister, he wrote, "could be very flexible and compliant when the need arose." The reason he resigned, he said, was that "he told a tale in high places that questioned the integrity and dignity of a senior government official, and in so doing he believed that he was serving the interests of his nation. However, fate did not smile upon Saad Pasha for having followed this impulse, for it occurred to some that his efforts were designed to sow discord between two personages of high stature, whereas it is in the interests of the nation to promote concord and understanding between them."

Contemporary *Al-Ahram* readers would have made sense of what to us would initially be an enigma. That was because they would have known that by "high places" Aref was alluding to the Khedive Abbas, that the "senior official" was Hussein Muharram Pasha whom Abbas wanted to appoint as administrator of the affairs of Saliha Hanem, the widow of Prince Mohamed Ibrahim. The appointment required Saad Zaghloul's authorisation, which he refused on the grounds that Muharram was corrupt. As Muharram was on good terms with both the khedive and the British High Commissioner Lord Kitchener, Abbas insisted that the minister of justice substantiate his claims.

This Zaghloul was unable to do, "in spite of his customary eloquence and force of discourse," as Aref wryly commented. The khedive thus had a golden opportunity to get rid of the "troublesome minister" without encountering objections from the high commissioner. Aref was delighted. Abbas had thwarted Zaghloul's scheme to sow discord between "two personages of high stature."

Aref further wrote that Zaghloul, after submitting his resignation, sought the intercession of a member of the royal family "to present to the khedive his (Zaghloul's) expressions of sincere repentance and servitude" and to "lay at his royal feet" Zaghloul's request for an audience. Yet, Aref continues, "he had no alternative but to resign, for the concord between the two personages of high stature is more solid than he imagined and the interests that bind them are too strong to be shaken by slander."

Moreover, as though it were not sufficient to depict Zaghloul as spineless and to insinuate that he had offered to compromise the integrity of his position, Aref further accused him of duplicity. The resignation tendered by Zaghloul to the khedive on 31 March, and deposited in the Egyptian ministerial archives, read, "As a result of my failure to secure the satisfaction of Your Royal Highness, I feel myself no longer capable of fulfilling the duties of my position. I, therefore, find it imperative to submit to Your Royal Highness my resignation from my post, in the hopes that you will accept it."

According to Aref, Zaghloul made two copies of this letter of resignation. "It is rumoured, however, that he consigned the second copy to his brother to deliver to the British high commissioner, along with the message, 'You have sacrificed me to appease the khedive.' However, Kitchner responded that what had occurred was in the interests of the public welfare."

Saad Zaghloul was not about to take these insults lying down. We find his reaction in the entry into his memoirs for 6 April. That evening at the rural estate of his father-in-law, Mostafa Fahmi, "we received the newspapers and discovered that one of them — *Al-Ahram* — had published an article carrying the signature 'Aref'. The article was so slanderous that I felt I had no recourse but to take the publisher to court. I dispatched the necessary telegrams and, at the same time, I wrote to the owner of *Al-Ahram* asking him to inform me of the identity of the author of that letter."

Al-Ahram published the letter it had received from Saad Zaghloul. It read: "The contents of the letter written by Aref and published in yesterday's *Al-Ahram* are entirely false, particularly the suggestion that I appealed to one of the members of the royal family to intercede with the khedive to express my remorse, to seek his forgiveness and to beg him to retain me in my post so that I might serve as his weapon against his adversaries. I am prepared to have the truth made explicit, which can only be done if Aref reveals his true identity. My dignity does not permit me to discuss these matters further with a person whose identity remains unknown to me, particularly as the exposure of the truth requires the divulgence of certain information which should remain confidential."

The same day *Al-Ahram* received a second article from Aref. It prefaced the article with an explanation to its readers that the newspaper had communicated to Aref Zaghloul's request to the newspaper to divulge his identity. Aref had responded that he bore full responsibility for what he wrote and would write in the future and that he authorised *Al-Ahram* to divulge his real name only if asked to do so by one of the national or mixed courts.

In his memoirs, Zaghloul describes Aref's second article as "longer than a winter's night and much colder and sharper than the blade of a sword."

Reading the letter, one has little difficulty in detecting the venom that Zaghloul found so chilling. It recounted incidents over the entire course of Zaghloul's career that, if proven true, would have considerably hampered his future prospects in political life. That Zaghloul had no intention of abandoning political life with his resignation from the Ministry of Justice is evident from his memoirs and borne out by later facts. He was, therefore, keen to clear himself of all aspersions against his character. Aref wrote that while minister of education, Zaghloul, eager to ingratiate himself with an aristocratic family whose son was attending Assiut elementary school, had the pupil exempted from tuition fees. Lord Cromer, then high commissioner, harshly reprimanded him for contravening instructions to end all forms of free education. Then, while minister of justice, Zaghloul had nominated an individual for a chair in the Court of Appeals which had fallen empty. However, "the government rejected Zaghloul's nominee and approved the candidate nominated by the cabinet, with which decision Zaghloul promptly complied."

On 13 April 1912, the Public Prosecutor's Office summoned Daoud Barakat, editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram*, for questioning regarding the articles published in his newspaper under the byline "Aref". When Barakat divulged the author's identity, Zaghloul was not totally taken by surprise. It was Ismail Abaza, a prominent Egyptian politician known for his close connections to Abdeen Palace. Barakat then submitted to the prosecution the originals of the letters that had been published in *Al-Ahram* so that the lawyers could determine their authenticity and ascertain that they corresponded accurately with the printed versions. With a measure of relief, *Al-Ahram* informed its readers: "We have respected the author's wishes to maintain the confidentiality of his identity unless ordered to do otherwise by the courts. We have been ordered by the courts to divulge his identity and have complied and submitted the appropriate documents. Having so acted, the honourable prosecution has no desire to implicate us further in this case and to punish the newspaper for what it publishes."

The following day, the prosecution summoned Abaza who admitted full responsibility for the letters. However, as *Al-Ahram* reports, when the prosecutor began questioning him on the contents of the letters, Abaza responded, "In order to answer your questions regarding these letters, I require at least two weeks in order to prepare my defense and to gather the pertinent evidence." Zaghloul's lawyers responded by alleging that Abaza had written his letters after Zaghloul had left public office, opening himself up to possible charges of defamation of character. Abaza responded, "I criticised the performance of his duties while in government office and the faults to which I have alluded were directed at him in his capacity as minister. I, therefore, have the right to substantiate my claims." Not only did the prosecution approve Abaza's request for a delay, it also approved his request that Zaghloul himself be present during the investigatory procedures, "since his lawyers cannot answer for him in matters pertaining to his personality which only he knows."

The trial resumed on 28 April. Present were Abaza, defended by Fahmi Izzat and Desouki Abaza, and Zaghloul's lawyers, Ibrahim El-Halbawi and Mohamed Yousef. The latter opened the hearings with the statement: "My client has asked me to state that the purpose of his suit is not to exact revenge, but to defend the interests of truth against the forces of falseness."

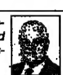
While the hearings were under way, attempts were made to seek a settlement out of court. Mediators for Zaghloul had approached Abaza's lawyers with the proposal that, if Abaza published a formal letter of apology, Zaghloul would drop charges. Abaza refused, leaving no alternative but for the law to pursue its course.

On 30 May, Cairo Criminal Court resumed hearings. Thousands of people arrived at the courthouse on the assumption that the hearings were public. To their great disappointment, and particularly rankling for the members of the press, the hearings were declared secret and could only be attended by the members of the court, the litigants and their representatives.

It is only from Zaghloul's memoirs that we learn what truly occurred. None of the witnesses, whether those brought by the defense or by the claimant, could corroborate Abaza's account. Two cited the need for confidentiality demanded by high office, a third denied that he had seen a second copy of Zaghloul's resignation letter, and a fourth denied that Zaghloul had sent his resignation letter to Kitchner first. The only witness whose testimony might have lent some force in Abaza's defense was that of Muharram Pasha, who did confirm that Zaghloul had attempted to discredit him. But he added that both the khedive and Kitchner gave little weight to Zaghloul's opinion and still wanted to appoint him as guardian to Saliha Hanem.

On 2 June the court announced its verdict. It came as quite a disappointment to Zaghloul. In the opinion of the court, Aref's articles did not constitute defamation of character, but rather criticism of a political figure. However, since Abaza was unable to corroborate his charges against Zaghloul, the court sentenced him to a fine of LE10 and to payment of the compensation demanded by the claimant which was LE1. Zaghloul also expected a more enthusiastic response to his "victory". However, as he wrote in his memoirs, "I only received a few congratulatory telegrams and visits from some friends." What particularly rankled with Zaghloul, however, was the official, publicised version of the court's explanation of its verdict, which appeared on 8 June. Zaghloul accused Kitchner of suppressing certain aspects of the original ruling several days previously.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



'Arab water' exhibition and conference to be held in Cairo from 26 - 28 April '98

AN 'ARAB WATER' conference and exhibition will be held from 26 to 28 April 1998 — organised by the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources — at the Cairo International Conference Centre, under the auspices of Mohamed Abu Zeid, minister of public works and water resources.

More than 1,200 professionals from 20 countries are expected to attend the conference. The main issues under discussion will be; water treatment technology, resource management, distribution and transport, telecommunication technology, financing, privatisation and human resources.

For more information, please call Nadia Romanion: 3423962.

Money & Business



Egypt participates in new international investment fund

A NEW CLOSED international investment fund, with 59.83 per cent of Egyptian investments, was recently listed on the Irish Stock Exchange. The new fund's capital amounts to $53.5 million.

Egyptian investors in the fund include the four public banks, Misr Insurance Company and Sociétée Générale Nationale Bank. In comparison, non-Egyptian Arab investments represent 18.27 per cent of the total capital compared to the 16.27 per cent of European, and the 5.23 per cent of American, investments.

The investment fund is managed by Sociétée Générale Emerging Europe Asset Management Ltd.

CEBIT '98 Hannover open for business



Mr Ali Ghoneim, vice-chairman of the board, general manager of Al-Ahram Establishment and general manager of AMAC, presenting the distinction award to Miss Mona El-Mahdi, CEBIT supervisor at the German Arab Chamber of Commerce, in appreciation for the distinguished participation of CEBIT in Al-Ahram's sixth ACITEX exhibition

THE CEBIT Fair — held annually in Hannover, Germany — will be held this year from 19-25 March. The trade fair will include more than 7,200 exhibitors from all over the world, displaying their products over an area of 360,000 square metres. Exhibitors at CEBIT '98 are from the following fields:

Information Technology (1,608 exhibitors)
Network Computing (458)
Computer Integrated Manufacturing (428)
Software (2,515)
Consulting and Services (481)
Telecommunications (832)
Office Technology (261)
Bank Technology (188)
Security Equipment/Card Technology (231)
Research and Technology Transfer (203)

The fair is visited annually by around 600,0000 people from all over the world. The German Arab Chamber of Commerce provides Egyptians willing to visit CEBIT with discounted entrance cards to the fair. The chamber can also book flight tickets to Hannover, in addition to organising accommodation throughout the fair's duration.

For more information please contact Miss Mona El-Mahdi, Hannover fairs' supervisor at the chamber. Tel: 3413662

ACITEX wins praise all round



Tens of cars parked in front of the CICC — showing the huge interest in ACITEX

THE SUCCESS of Al-Ahram's Sixth Computers and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX) — held last 18-21 February at the Cairo International Conference Centre CICC— stresses the degree of interest in the language of the century.

It has become clear that the Cairo International Conference Centre (CICC) is the ideal location for holding serious conferences and important exhibitions. For example, the above photo — showing the sheer number of cars parked — reveals the density and hence interest of visitors in Al-Ahram's sixth ACITEX exhibition. In fact, to meet the needs of the large number of visitors to the exhibition, the organisers were also forced to open the car park of the stadium to accomodate the extra cars.

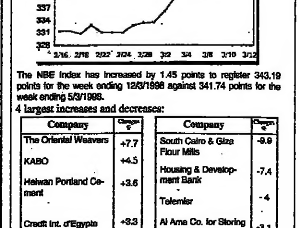
Applause was received for the exhibition all round — particularly the showrooms, which allowed for easy access and suitable display of the items, as well as the press and seminar rooms where the participating companies held various seminars.

The high number of visitors not only indicates the importance of ACITEX, but also reveals the potential presence of decision-makers who have vital interests in computers and information technology.

We hope that success will accompany ACITEX's seventh exhibition which will be held from 3-6 February 1999, once again at the CICC.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 5 - 12 March 1998



The NBE Index has increased by 1.45 points to register 343.19 points for the week ending 12/3/1998 against 341.74 points for the week ending 5/3/1998.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %	Company	Change %
The Oriental Weavers	+7.7	South Cairo & Giza Flour Mills	-9.9
KABO	+4.5	Housing & Development Bank	-7.4
Helwan Portland Cement	+3.6	Telemisr	-4
Credit Int. d'Egypte	+3.3	Al Ama Co. for Storing & Work Housing	-3.1

Correcting past mistakes

The UNDP is joining efforts to conserve Islamic monuments in Fatimid Cairo. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is putting forward a series of proposals to conserve Fatimid Cairo. The site includes the largest cluster of Islamic monuments in the country and, possibly, the world. The proposals focus on preserving this priceless heritage and improving the living standard of the area's residents.

"Historic Cairo has a specific physical character and a strong social identity, with invaluable monuments dominating the area," Michele Fouad, the project's supervisor, said.

According to the study, the UNDP will work in conjunction *with the Supreme Council of Antiquities* (SCA) to conserve Fatimid Cairo because, the report says, "it contains some of the most important monuments in the Islamic world." The decision was taken in response to President Hosni Mubarak's directives that the monuments should be preserved.

Officials from the ministries of culture and tourism and the Cairo Governorate are expected to meet soon to examine the UNDP proposals for conserving the area and turning it into what has been described as an "open-air museum".

But restoring the area to its former glory is a difficult challenge, antiquities experts believe.

A report prepared by a team of Islamic architecture experts described the situation in Fatimid Cairo as deplorable. The report, made available to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, states that encroachments upon historic sites have reached tragic proportions, *with more than 180 such violations* recorded in Al-Muezz Street alone.

The report put the blame squarely on the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) for leasing some of the historic palaces, *madrassas* (schools) and *beits* (houses) to traders in the Khan Al-Khalili bazaar. "Palaces such as the palace of Beshtak, the Ashrafiya and Salhiyha *madrassas* have been occupied by traders," says Abdullah El-Attar, head of the Islamic monuments department at the SCA. "The Mosque of Suleiman El-Salehdar is being used as a storehouse by the Ministry of Education. The palaces are in the worst possible condition and, if these encroachments continue, things will be even worse."

The area covered by the UNDP plan of action extends from the gates of Bab Al-Futuh and Bab Al-Nasr southward to the Mosque of Ibn Tulun. The UNDP study warns against mounting "pressure for large-scale development" which poses a threat to "Old Cairo's identity, changing the pattern of land usage from residential to commercial in the absence of adequate infrastructure and a national land usage policy."

The study noted that "there has been a long-*term decline in the appearance of historic Cairo* as living conditions and the quality of life deteriorated rapidly. There is no systematic solid waste collection in the area and the majority of the entrepreneurs are not environmentally oriented," the study added.

According to a demographic study carried out as part of the UN conservation project, there are some 30,000 squatters in historic Cairo, living in shacks, ruined buildings and on vacant plots of land. The latest census shows that about 15 per cent of the work force in the area are unemployed. As many as half of all residents may be living below the poverty line.

The study says the "international community seems powerless to make a significant technical and financial contribution to improve conditions."

The UNDP report suggests that the ownership *of all monuments "should be transferred to the* Supreme Council of Antiquities as currently only five per cent are owned by the Council while 95 per cent belong to the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf*."

It also suggests that pollution should be reduced by relocating workshops that pose an ecological hazard outside historic Cairo.

A plan is also under study to ban motorised traffic from Al-Muezz Street, turning it into a promenade for pedestrians. Only service vehicles would be allowed on the street during specific hours. Emergency vehicles would be allowed at all times.



photos: Sherif Sonbol



Public involvement in conservation

Members of Roteract, a branch of the Rotary Club, took up brooms, pails and cloths this week to give Cairo's El-Muezz Lidinillah Street another clean-up. Nevine El-Aref was there for the shining day.

"This is our second attempt to upgrade the street," said Tamer El-Fiqqi, urban designer architect. "Our aim this year was to provide services for pedestrians and make it easier for them to visit the historically important street."

The work, made possible after the street was closed to pedestrians, involved clearing piles of garbage that had blighted Islamic monuments in the area, placing dustbins and adorning the street with flower pots. Benches have also been installed.

"This is the second step to re-plan the street," said El-Fiqqi, adding that *last year 22 signs identifying various sites and giving historical facts were* positioned. A map of the street identified where each monument was, while tourist agencies will provide brochures for every monument.

Roteract is a charity organisation working in collaboration with the Information Service.

El-Muezz Street is one of the most crowded areas in the so-called Fatimid historical zone, which includes 68 sites in a three-kilometre-long area. Its clean-up was just a small step, but one in the right direction.

New provincial museum

The newly renovated and enlarged museum in Mansoura is an important new attraction in the city. Nevine El-Aref attended the inaugural ceremony

Following five years of restoration and renovation, the Mansoura National Museum officially opened last week. The Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) launched the inauguration of the museum, whose exhibits are primarily artifacts from the Ayyubid era in the 13th century, when the crusaders came as far as the Delta. The house in which Louis IX was placed under house arrest, now renovated, is part of the complex.

Ahmed Nawar, head of the museum department, said that attractive new displays were arranged and decorated and appropriate lighting, ventilation and air-conditioning installed. The walls were cleaned and damaged tiles replaced. "The renovation was carried out by museum experts from the SCA for LE600,000," Nawar said.

Mansoura Museum is small, located in El-Muwafi Square off Port Said Street. It was originally opened in the 1960s by the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser in memory of the victory of the city against the seventh Crusades headed by King Louis IX.

The museum includes three sections: the newly-restored Dar Ibn-Luqman (Ibn-Luqman House), where Louis IX had been held, *the main exhibition hall and a new hall* designed to hold exhibitions of contemporary artists.

Maher Galal, head of the Islamic and Coptic Department in Daqahliya Governorate, said "Part of Dar Ibn-Luqman, which is open to visitors, is all that remains of the original structure. The house once belonged to Fakhrul-Din Ibn Luqman, the head of juries during the Ayyubid period. He built it in 1219 to serve as his office in Mansoura. It overlooked the Nile but is now surrounded by a small, nicely cultivated garden. The house was originally 200 square metres, but 50 square metres is all that remains."

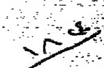
The museum has two storeys. The first contains two storerooms and the second a hall where Ibn-Luqman worked and received visitors. "Apart from it being the prison where the French king was incarcerated in 1250, Dar Ibn-Luqman is an historically important building in its own right," said Galal.

Among the noteworthy attractions in the museum are weapons and military apparel used during the Ayyubid era and paintings depicting the Franco-Egyptian war and the capture *of King Louis* IX. A large map of old Mansoura and gypsum statues of Ayyubid rulers like El-Saleh Nagmul-Din El-Ayyoubi, Turanshah and Shagaret El-Durr are also on display.

The inauguration was attended by senior officials including Maj. Gen. Fakhrul-Din Khaled, the governor of the province, and Mohamed Saleh, director of the Egyptian Museum as well as journalists and SCA officials. All are confident that Mansoura will see more visitors in the near future.

Statue of Louis IX in prison

Entrance is LE2 for Egyptians and LE10 for foreigners.



Pastoral symphony

The third National Symposium on Egyptian rural women, which included several representatives from different Arab countries for the first time, took place this week in Menoufiya under the auspices of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, who attended the closing ceremony. Rania Khallaf was there

In her closing address, last Monday, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak commended the work of the the third National Symposium on rural women and underlined her support for the recommendations issued by the symposium, the most important of which are extending the infrastructure to the rural areas, providing more education opportunities, promoting reproductive health programmes and introducucing medical insurance services to rural areas.

In a two-day series of workshops aimed at improving the condition of rural women, the symposium, which convenes every two years under the auspices of Mrs Mubarak, president of the National Committee for Egyptian Women, pinpointed several areas which needed to be addressed immediately. Among the most important issues discussed were the education of rural women, including the establishment of illiteracy eradication programmes; political, social and legal awareness programmes; increased attention to rural women's general and reproductive health, and development of crafts and small industries owned and managed solely by women. Member of Parliament Laila Takla explained the need to train more leaders selected from among the women of each village to head projects, whether income-generating, environmental or educational. Experience with rural women leaders has been excellent so far, and the system should be extended and generalised, she said.



At the end of the conference Mrs Suzanne Mubarak paid tribute to the efforts of rural leaders

The presence of delegates from 14 Arab countries including Lebanon, Syria, Algeria, Morocco Jordan, Kuwait, the Emirates, Iraq, Sudan and Mauritania, participating in the symposium for the first time, was enthusiastically acknowledged by the group of Egyptian rural women who attended the opening ceremony and were invited to discuss their own experiences with the participants in the five workshops. "The problems of rural women are the same all over the Arab world," said one of the Arab delegates, citing illiteracy, reproductive health, the lack of a separate income and absence of political participation as some of the issues which they and their Egyptian sisters confronted.

In his address, Adli Hussein, governor of Menoufiya, stressed the need to devise educational programmes relevant to rural conditions, with greater emphasis on agricultural problem-solving strategies, environmental awareness and preservation, the development of crafts and small industries as well as the introduction of new technologies aimed at increasing the quality of production.

According to Minister of Social Affairs Mervat Tellawi, 1,000 programmes aimed at eradicating illiteracy are already in place throughout the governorates, a number which will be doubled by 2000. Furthermore, LE15 million have been earmarked this year for the establishment of small projects, initiated and run by women who will be granted medium-term, interest-free loans for this purpose. Tellawi emphasised that small industries must be placed within the framework of a development plan and spoke of the need for economic planning in the rural areas. She said that 4,000 voluntary organisations are currently offering medical services to rural inhabitants, and expressed hope that help will be extended to these associations.

Several participants in the workshop on the education of the female child called for attention to be paid to discrepancies in the levels of education of rural children: girls are often taken out of school at an early age to help in the home and in the fields, while their brothers are allowed to complete their education. At this point in time, the gap seems to be widening, with very young girls dropping out regularly or, at best, attending school irregularly because they are required to help with household chores and the rearing of siblings.

Another issue subjected to lengthy debate was the need for rural women to control a source of income. In many cases, rural women, like their urban counterparts, are the household's sole breadwinners. A degree of security and a regular income are essential for the well-being of the family. In this context, marketing techniques to improve the distribution of goods manufactured by rural women were discussed. The delegates from Jordan and Kuwait contributed examples of methods of marketing used in their countries. More markets need to be opened for new export-oriented products. Other suggestions included the creation of a central database covering the rural areas of the Arab countries from which information about demand and products available can be matched effectively to improve marketing and sales.

A house for women

March 1923 marked the fourth anniversary of the first women's demonstration led by Huda Sha'rawi. It is also the date on which the Egyptian Feminist Union was founded. Fayza Hassan looks back on 75 years of feminist success and failure

In her memoirs, Egyptian feminist Huda Sha'rawi gives a detailed description of what must have been one of the most crucial events in her long and brilliant career struggling for the achievement of political and social rights. In *Harem Years, the Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (translated and introduced by Margot Badran, Virago Press, 1986), she writes that Egyptians had begun voicing their demands for national independence at the end of World War I. A delegation was formed with the intention of travelling to London to present their case to the British authority, but was denied permission to leave Egypt. Consequently, the nationalists created the Wafd (Delegation) Party in 1919, under the leadership of Saad Zaghloul, as an organ through which they could formulate their demands and present them to the authorities through an official channel. As soon as the Wafd was established, the British arrested Saad Zaghloul and deported him to the Seychelles, together with a number of prominent members of the new party, whom they had pinpointed as the worst troublemakers. The day after news of the deportation reached the public, on 9 March 1919, popular demonstrations started in Cairo, spreading quickly throughout the country.

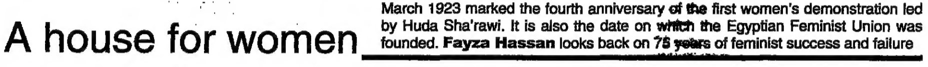
Huda Sha'rawi recorded these, and the events which followed, as well as the part women played in them, with great pride: "We women held our first demonstration on 16 March to protest the repressive acts and intimidation practiced by the British authority... In compliance with the orders of the authority, we announced our plans to demonstrate in advance but were refused permission... On the morning of 16 March, I sent placards to the house of the wife of Ahmad Bey Abu Usbaa, bearing slogans in Arabic and French painted in white on a background of black — the colour of mourning..."

There was some confusion as to whether permission was eventually granted, but the demonstration took place all the same. It is unfortunate that, at the time, much of its impact was lost, partly because of widespread perceptions that this was an event restricted to the upper class, and partly because neither Egyptian nor British men were prepared to take women seriously.

In a letter to his father dated 1 April 1919, Badran comments, Russel Pasha recounts the incident rather sarcastically: "...My next problem was a demonstration by the native ladies of Cairo... Well, they assembled in motorcars, etc., got out and started to walk in a procession... I let them get a little way and then blocked them in with police supported by troops and there the dear things had to remain for an hour and a half in the hot sun with nothing to sit on except the curb stone."

Esther Wissa, another pioneer of the feminist cause, who took part in this demonstration, describes the confrontation from the demonstrators' point of view: "We started out on a big demonstration carrying flags and slogans. After a little march, we were stopped and surrounded by the British soldiers with pointed guns and bayonets. We started remonstrating with them... After keeping us standing for about an hour in the hot sun, we were allowed to disperse and go home" (in Hanna E Wissa, *Assiout, the Saga of an Egyptian Family*, The Book Guild, 1994).

Undaunted by such anticlimactic beginnings, the women continued to lend their unwavering support to the members of the Wafd throughout their tribulations, and were often instrumental in keeping strikes to end the occupation alive. At the end of 1919, women's demonstrations were organised against the Milner mission, which had arrived in Egypt to investigate the revolution. For the first time, the women formed a political body, the Wafdist Women's Central Committee, of which Huda Sha'rawi was elected president. The Committee's main agenda was to assist the Wafd Party in its struggle.


March 1956: International Women's Day: leaders of Egyptian feminism

M Abdel-Rahman, Mrs Fahmi, Lily Doss, Tahia Halim, Khalda Zaher, Aisha Rateb, N El-Ghamrawi, Latfia El-Nadi, Hawwa Idris

By 1920, however, the women were complaining of the men's insensitivity to their cause and the lack of interest in their demands for a greater degree of emancipation. They also felt left out of the negotiations which were taking place between London and Cairo: not only excluded from these talks, they were also kept largely uninformed as to developments. It was obvious by now that the members of the Wafd did not consider women's emancipation and political participation one of their priorities. Nevertheless, the women persevered in the national struggle, and 1922 was a year of organised resistance, boycotts and mass meetings. It is in this climate of frustration and overt or covert rebellion that — separately from the ongoing negotiations, it seems — the Allenby Declaration was suddenly issued, unilaterally conceding Egypt's independence, with four restrictive clauses. The declaration was quietly promulgated on 16 March 1922 in the *Journal Officiel*.

For the women, it was too little, too late. They felt cheated. "We women consider it merely a move to paralyse our national movement and mute our passions," wrote Sha'rawi. For another year, Sha'rawi continued to lead the Wafdist women in the political arena, but in March 1923, she expressed her unwillingness to sacrifice women's liberation to men's political purposes and founded her own organisation, the Egyptian Feminist Union.

After the Sirdar of the Sudan was murdered, Sha'rawi found herself at loggerheads with what she considered Saad Zaghloul's conciliatory attitude towards the British. In an open letter which appeared in *Al-Akhbar* of 24 November 1924, writes Badran, she exhorted him to remove himself from the path of the liberation movement: "Since you have failed, while in public office, to fulfil your mandate by positive action, I ask you not to be an obstacle to your country's struggle for liberation... I ask you to step down." Sha'rawi also resigned from the presidency of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee.

From 1923 until her death in 1947, Sha'rawi, often accused of being more concerned with nationalist than feminist causes, continued to lead the struggle for the emancipation of women. In 1930, the Feminist Union moved into its new headquarters on Malika Nazli (now Ramses) Street. It subsequently became known as *Beit Al-Mar'a* (Women's House), but, when it was suggested that these words be engraved on the façade, public opposition was so strong that the project was shelved indefinitely, a clear indication that, if Sha'rawi had managed to open the doors of the harem to the women of her class during a time of exceptional national change, her opponents were waiting to bolt them at the first opportunity, locking the recalcitrant women out.



Not nearly enough

At one point in his life, soon after we were married, my late husband became obsessed by the need to earn more. It became a constant preoccupation. I had trouble understanding why, and used to joke about his being born a millionaire, without the millions. We were doing fine, I kept telling him: there was no reason to worry. Our expenses were growing practically by the minute and money was losing its value at the same rate, he would explain impatiently. His troubled state of mind, more than actual concern as to our financial situation, finally forced me to take him seriously. "How much would we need to make every month for you to feel secure?" I asked him one day. He named a figure. I remember that, at the time, it sounded staggering. My salary amounted to a little above quarter of the figure, and our combined earnings were still far below.

Why do we need so much? I wondered. We already had everything. We had never been deprived, I pointed out to him: we had a nice apartment in Alexandria, another in Cairo, a summer house in Agami, we were members of several clubs, owned a car in reasonable condition and our daughter was going to the best kindergarten in town. Were these not indications of our affluence? What else could we possibly need? My husband disagreed. He thought that what we could afford today might be out of reach tomorrow. He dreaded what might happen then. After lengthy discussions, we would always end up where we had started: short of the amount he had named, there was no security in sight. Although he was far from averse to saving, he did not look upon the practice as the answer to his problems. We needed to accumulate wealth and invest it wisely. Then, and only then, could we hope for returns equal to the golden figure.

Eventually, his constant worrying led us to leave everything behind and seek new shores, lands of opportunity. By normal standards, we must have been doing well there too, because once again we lived comfortably, and our daughters were able to attend good schools. Busy rebuilding our lives, my husband did not worry too much about the accumulation of wealth at first. Making ends meet, making our various payments in time, were more immediate preoccupations which kept him from peering into the future. Soon, however, we returned to the same subject. Inflation, my husband's old fixation, was apparently catching up with us. Something had to be done at once. He was convinced now that nowhere in the world could anyone attain permanent security on a salary, no matter how large. Social security and pensions were a joke which did not make him laugh. He was not going to wait until the monster ate up his modest nest egg. He intended to act now. Although he had always claimed extraordinary business acumen, but no opportunities to exercise it, an unfortunate foray into the world of the stock exchange soon convinced him that luck, at least, was not on his side.

With time, the needs of our household increased, and so did his tension. He was not getting any younger, he kept saying, and, if he was to achieve security, it was now or never. Finally, a decision was made. He had been offered a job in Egypt. He would take it and, with the proceeds from the sale of our various assets, we would have enough money to look into the future without apprehension. I was overjoyed at the prospect of seeing my family again and, for once, concurred that things were indeed looking up.

Reality was considerably different, although it took my husband a couple of years to admit that he was still short of the aim he had set for himself. We were making more money, of course, but we were spending it too, and security was further away than it had ever been. The golden figure had more than tripled, and we were almost as far from it as we had been when we had started off. There were always the tales of friends claiming that, in such or such a faraway country, there were fortunes to be picked up, and every now and then crazy plans to up and go would be hatched, but fortunately none came to fruition. I was growing weary of great upheavals. I intimated that, if only we had stayed in any one place long enough, we might have been able to attain the income level necessary to give him the sense of security which had been eluding him all his life.

In the end we stayed, not because he was ever convinced by my bit of wisdom, but because age eventually slowed him down. He never achieved what he had set out to do, but it saddens me more than anything to think that the golden figure he named at the beginning of our married life as his ultimate financial goal is today far less than the price of dinner for two in a good restaurant.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Cheese tart

Ingredients:

Tart:
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 egg (whole)
1/4 cup cooking oil
1/4 cup butter ghee
Dash of salt
1/4 cup lukewarm water (to hold)

Filling:
1 cup whole milk
1 cup yoghurt
2 tbsp. all purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
3 tbsp. each of feta cheese, mozzarella, Rumi (hard Greek cheese), Gouda, Edam (all grated)

Method:
Combine all tart ingredients. Form the dough and leave to rest for one hour. Place in a pie pan of 28cm in diametre and pat by hand to fill. Prick pie with a fork thoroughly. Put for five minutes in medium preheated oven. Remove and allow to cool. Pour over all filling ingredients after blending them well by hand. Sprinkle some grated mozzarella on top and put in the oven until filling is firm and sides are golden (approximately 45 minutes).

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

In the raw

Andrew Steele's not squeamish

It certainly looks the part — Sushiyama, that is, the Japanese outlet on the ground floor of the World Trade Centre complex. The ceilings are a veritable post-modern maze of matt-cream piping, each leading to either air-conditioner or extractor fan. Every surface is of dark, polished granite, very cold, very hard, very chic. The frosty theme extends to the windows and glass panelling, Japanese motifs etched in. We were seated in a flash by one of the charming staff, dressed to kill in a saucy little Samurai number, and looking, for all his efforts, not very Japanese at all. The menu is vast and, to those uninitiated in the fine art of Japanese dining, somewhat daunting. However, with the assistance of my culinary guru, I was able to put together a sumptuous selection of gourmet indulgences, which hit exactly the right spot.

Two raw fish dishes opened up proceedings, the first superbly meaty strips of fine tuna-steak, marinated to the gills with onion and ginger. It was pungent and savoury and called itself *Magoru Tataki*. We called it heaven on a chopstick. Its sister dish (if dishes are gendered) was the equally choice *Shiromi Usuzu Kuri* — wafer-thin strips of yellowtail, served with a *ponzu* sauce. The fish came nestling on a bed of crushed ice and lemon, the sauce in little lacquer bowls on the side. A delicate and subtle twang, compared to the gaudy brashness of the tuna. Fine fruity undertones, green onion rings and light soy sauce made the *ponzu* piquant and perfect. Good omens for what was to follow? Absolutely!

The soup course was next, Nairy soliciting the delights of the *Suimono*, myself upping the yang content of my macrobiotic diet with a hearty miso broth. Both came in dear little lidded pots and were every bit as wonderful as the previous catch. The final flourish was provided by a selection of good sushi — seven pieces in all, which came billed as *Jozushi* and pleased the eye and the palate. Raw tuna, squid, shrimp and whitebait stuck to sticky mounds of white rice with a potent horseradish glue — the sushi chef here knows his onions. A wise selection of venue on Nairy's behalf and not such a wound in the wallet as one might have expected. A special, treat-yourself sort of dinner for two at one of Cairo's flashiest outlets came to a reasonable LE200, with three local Stellas. Which, for the service, the quality, the ambience, the decor and my goodness, the food, was a pretty penny well spent. For those of you who prefer your fish tampered with, think again: dining in the raw can be fun.

Sushiyama, The World Trade Centre, 1191 Nile Corniche, Boulaq
Tel: 764425

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. Behave sulkily (9)
5. Dancing parties (5)
10. Harvest (4)
14. Summit (4)
15. German submarine, hyph wds (5)
16. Own (4)
17. Pole of cart drawn by two animals side by side (4)
18. Electrically mounted weight of watch for keeping the mainstream wound (5)
19. European river (4)
20. Dinner course (6)
22. Classifiers (7)
24. Part of QED (4)
26. Traditional Japanese drama (3)
27. Oppress; tension (8)
32. Ragamuffin (6)
35. Optical device for changing convergence of light, rays, etc (4)
36. Fossil resin used as insulator or for making jewelry (5)
38. Presently (3)
39. Select (3)
40. Molecule composed of two identical simpler molecules (5)
41. Gnawed (3)
42. Dung-beetle (3)
43. Principle (5)
44. Singular (4)
45. Designated in a specific way (9)
47. Camping equipment, pl. (8)
59. Boxing champ (3)
51. Litigation (4)
52. Hitch together; relate (7)
56. Furl again (6)
60. Enthusiastic (4)
61. Assistants (5)
64. A crystalline compound (4)
65. Make one's way with difficulty (4)
66. Molest; deride (5)
67. Extinct (4)
68. Winter vehicle (4)
69. Limited (5)
70. Discover (4)

DOWN
1. Lion's or horse's pride (4)
2. Demonstrative: begin: above-board (4)
3. Decomposed vegetable matter used in gardening (4)
4. Quick; particular; say (7)
5. Government department; desk (6)
6. Father of, Arabic (3)
7. Fate (3)
8. Asian country formerly part of Indo China (4)
9. More powerful or vigorous (8)
10. Cadence (6)
11. Facility (4)
12. Declare (4)
13. Personal, abb. (4)
21. Expression of hesitation, pl. (3)
23. Bellow (4)
25. Suite; exercise; educate (5)
27. Tramps (5)
28. Place plant in larger container (5)
29. Admission (5)
30. Ant (5)
32. Half-witted (5)
33. Brilliant; well-known (5)
34. Jugs (5)
37. Beasts, Fr. (5)
40. Devote (8)
43. Comb. form for "far" (4)
44. Push out; thrust oneself importunately (7)
46. Alit (6)
48. Doctored (6)
49. Connect; attachment (3)
52. Harsh cries of crows (4)
53. Ellipsoidal (4)
54. Brood of pheasants (4)
55. Bound (4)
57. A krone is a hundred of these (4)
58. Cavort (4)
59. Title of respect (4)
62. Mr Hammarskjöld (3)
63. Weather directions (3)

Last week's solution

Al-Ahram Weekly

Maya Selim:

Body and soul



photos: Sherif Sonbol

Even her screams are like a song: this water nymph is adept at taming monsters

The sylphide is without a body, but her emanation is here beside me, driving a fast car through the impenetrable ooze of the downtown city traffic. We are going towards her home and roost, the ballet section of the Cairo Conservatoire of Music. Maya Selim is her name.

She says: "Did you ever actually see me dance?" "No, never. I was out of Egypt during the days of your stage career." "So, we've never met." "No, never. I've never seen you before this morning's date." "Then why are you writing a profile about me?" "You're a central part of the balletic history of Egypt for this century. This is enough to warrant a glimpse." "Yes, az glimpse at least, but that is not much. We must do better than a glimpse." "We hope we have done."

She complains about her profile, but she should not have. It is one of her most striking qualities. Facially she's no rock of ages, no lumps or clefts, no bones thrusting out at you — nothing aggressive. She's more Ondine than an aggressive empress of the swans. More a water nymph. Elegant, sharp, not brittle but honed to a fine cutting edge. A rare face, ageless without apparent effort. Wit shows, but in talk this face never bothers or belittles. She's not even discreet. She's too imperious for half measures. This face seems to have no past and she's never nostalgic: an elegy would not suit her. She resembles no one exactly, except perhaps Alexandra Damlova, Choura for short, Diaghilev's favourite dancer and goddess of two continents.

Mozart's C major piano concerto is her type. High manners take you over life like a golden girl on a flying trapeze. She does this, she flies without effort and never seems to run out of breath. She talks beautifully, in and out of everything. Pithy, no nonsense but a wide and lively coverage.

We're here. She pulls her car into place in front of the Conservatoire. Our drive has been smooth because, once in motion, she never really stops for anything — which is hair raising: even face to face with traffic bang-ups, it's all the same: perpetual motion. A steel will and courage like an army sniper. Lorry drivers seem to love her. She's cunning and knows her man. Way up aloft, a big dangerous-looking head, afloat in smiles and waving her through. She's adept at this. The taming of the monsters.

This seems to work in the ballet class we attend in the huge rehearsal room of the Conservatoire. The room is cold, pitiless and formidably empty, like a criminal courtroom before a trial, a typical ballet class atmosphere. Mirrored walls savagely reveal the images reflected, mostly, thankfully, of dancers: they are used to mirrors, most of their lives are spent in front of them. Not for love, for faults. These class members and most dancers are never vain, they appraise themselves like cattle thieves, particularly at this stage of "morning class", which is body only: the dance proper comes later. You feel horrendous if you take a look at yourself. What's amiss with you? The lot. General looseness, imminent collapse of back and knees and total surrender to Weldtschmerz, followed by instant self-incineration. Then one snaps out of it to attend to one of Maya Selim's morning classes. Her method is renewal, self-supporting and renovating.

For the dancers, the Selim class is something else. How to get through the meat grinder, emerging at the other end in one piece. She's total demolition in the art of rebuilding the human form to survive the rituals of the classic ballet. "This ritual is very ancient" — she's talking — "maybe it started in the east, like most of the arts. It is all gifts, we can only touch beginnings and endings. The art is up to the dancers, and dancers understand this, their instinctual response is immediate, like animals and birds. Ballanchine told his dancers that dancing is a question of morality." Maya says dancers are just the best of all people. "Each one is a jewel, and the great ones" — she stops and then goes on — "you must search your own depth of response to these souls. There's an exultation beyond any other human condition except madness or religious ecstasy. And this poor, beautiful, vulnerable body is its instrument."

Her class, "the girls", get poised for action, nine of them, no boys. She teaches only girls because the rules are like that. The boys, in another room, have a Russian male teacher. But boys barge into her classes: there is a tension when they do. She's very direct. There is immediately a physical, sensual element around. What is she — sister, friend, aunt, mother or just tormentor? She's a muse and her touch is immaculate. Probenjeskaya had such a touch. If the boys are stubborn with Maya Selim and inclined to just roll along to the beat, she flies at them, stopping just short of what parents often do to their children. The boys understand, a moment of deep consideration, muse retreats ready for another approach. It ends in smiles.

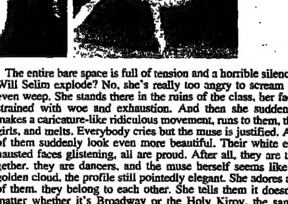
The nine girls are another matter. She goes at them like a football coach. They have become valuable future material for an opera house, the Opera House. Their work and toils have taken seven years so far. They are educated as well as they dance. Their life is action and the clock rules. Mostly, life is hard for them. The cost of living rises and so does the population, so the competition is razor sharp. Managers, whose methods are often manipulative and disreputable, wait for cabaret and music hall material, not swan queens. The girls know everything, the Opera House is their target. But all this needs money and there are family troubles. All the girls are very beautiful, tall, majestic, cool, almost to the point of non-involvement, they are not warm, and with reason. This is Egypt, they must project dignity or look out. The Opera House rightly maintains a strong line in all this. To cross the border into even respectable show-biz will ruin their chances of making it in higher places.

There come now some moments of stress in the class because a few of the girls are revolting and quietly making jokes beneath their status as members of the Conservatoire. So Maya Selim is on the track. She is not pleased, chicks do not stray. The class begins again. The girls say "let's do it", so the morning stretch-out at the barre begins, the daily beloved torture of how to face the infinite with your body. And it hurts like hell. Pulls and pushes are part of the determination of torment. Nine beautiful girls in black stretch lycra leggings arching themselves like dark lyre birds and the tenth entity, the huge mirror on the wall, reflects their every move. Then comes the sound of Maya Selim's voice. She never sits down, she's on the move continually, darting, flashing and following them around amidst their steps like a retributive dervish. Her voice rises as their errors become obvious. She has a strange voice because, under pressure, it never coarsens or roughens. Its high, clear, bell-like sound is painful, she seems agonised, not annoyed. She screams. It's lovely to hear. The late conductor Georg Solti had a similar voice that made entire orchestras quake. So do these girls at Selim's voice. This morning she is not so fond. This is serious, she even drowns the piano of the accompanist, a very lovely talented player, Russian and caring enough to keep the exact rhythm and timing of the dancers to the eagle eye of Selim.









Selim now goes into fast forward overdrive. She has her reasons. Two girls obviously are tired and cannot do the routines. Selim insults, flies around the room. From a gallery far overhead, looking down into the rehearsal room, some other dancers very silently pause, listen, shake their heads together and hurry on.

The mistress of the scene is reaching danger point. She is down amongst the girls, still attempting their movements. She blasts at them, sometimes almost squatting — she's a dancer after all — then springs up into the air and comes down again to the exact time of the jumps. She's telling them they are ugly lumps, they've got no insides. "Where's your inside? If that's beautiful so will be your steps. What's inside you? Potato? You don't dance, you just flop. Heavy dollops of boiled potato, cold, ugly, dishonest. You don't even try to be flowers. I work harder than you for nothing. Worthless. Where are your legs? No legs. Potatoes without legs do not belong in any class of mine." Her periods of vocal anguish rival Bernhardt, she plays it beautifully, she's got a terribly pained expression as the Selim voice soars in ever more corrosive invective. One girl nervously gets into a difficult movement. She runs, she jumps and sails into perfect head equilibrium, like a bird, an eagle in the air. She's dancing and sowing over the disaster around her. Then this good pupil relaxes into a wing halted dive, landing and radiating centre stage. All is well. Maya Selim has seen what happened. One pupil has strayed off beat, tired and city strained; another giving the real thing is too much for her. She screams stop. The pianist also stops, the class stops, everything comes to an end.

The entire bare space is full of tension and a horrible silence. Will Selim explode? No, she's really too angry to scream or even weep. She stands there in the ruins of the class, her face strained with woe and exhaustion. And then she suddenly makes a caricature-like ridiculous movement, runs to them, the girls, and melts. Everybody cries but the muse is justified. All of them suddenly look even more beautiful. Their white exhausted faces glistening, all are proud. After all, they are together, they are dancers, and the muse herself seems like a golden cloud, the profile still pointedly elegant. She adores all of them, they belong to each other. She tells them it doesn't matter whether it's Broadway or the Holy Kirov, the same guillotine "will wait for you if your quality slides into laziness or lack of reverence for the holy dance. I'm a servant like you. It is the worst possible lack of manners to insult me with carelessness." The group of pupils begins street dancing routines. They dare Maya Selim to show that she bears no ill will. She laughs and begins with them the same routines seen in popular places. She does them well; in fact, she does them better. The young ones take their shoulder bags and the day's oddments and go their particular ways. Maya Selim makes straight for her bare office.

"You see," she says, "I am not the office or board-room type. I would like authority, the power to use it to help the ballet, but I'm not settled to sit at chairs and tables discussing costs. Better the action and contact with the dancers, even if it's the sweaty side of the theatre rather than anything cut down to ordinary size, like being in a big box."

Maya Selim said you'd better get through it, the CV part of me. So, she was born in Cairo, 11 December 1942. She studied and danced at the Bolshoi in the classic roles of Giselle, Casse-Noisette, La Fontaine de Bakhchisaray, Don Juan, La Belle au Bois Dormant, and Fransesca Da Rimini. She is really an Alexandrian at heart and has spent many years in Paris, where she received honours from the Sorbonne for her work on the ballet. Her dancing life was short. She seems to have always preferred history and choreography to the repetitive rhythm of theatre dance. She is alive to the as yet limited role the dance theatre plays in contemporary ballet. "They get entangled in subjects and ideas that are ill expressed by the dance in any form," says Maya Selim. She would like to have her own company, but — she shrugs — she does no dreaming. For the classics, "life is harder now than when we began in Cairo — more competition, technical and, as a dancer's life is so short, it simply does not permit a long student time. Pain and dross are part of the classic dancer's life, pain is a bad habit of the body. Every dancer learns how to cope with it. Russians fly in and out of pain, even agony, that is one of their secrets. The body defines the soul, *prima* the physical, *doppo* the" — then she laughs. "Anyway, as Plato said, the soul can always take care of itself."

Selim's big office looked entirely unloved; she's never in it. There is a knock on the door and a young woman and two children, boy and girl about ten-years-old, are admitted. The young woman, obviously the mother, nice, plain and dumpy, says to Maya Selim a proper good day and then apologises for her children's failure to go to the morning ballet class. They are all balletomanes and the children both wish to be dancers at the opera in the future.

The mother pushes them gently forward towards Selim to shake her hand and say the proper words. This they do with the greatest aplomb. The boy is of the greatest handsomeness, like his sister, smartly dressed, bright. Maya Selim looks at them and falls for them and goes impulsively forward, embracing them in the proper Egyptian manner, then all three turn, no nonsense, and leave the room.

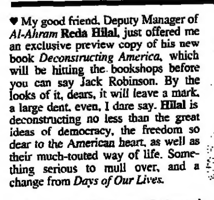
Maya Selim alone — her aura of bright shine intensified — glowed and laughed. "You know," she said, "Marie Curie once said she was very fond of Casse-Noisette and then she went home and discovered radium. Like the ballet, it is all inside, breathing, and that is really love."

Profile by **David Blake**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ My good friend, Deputy Manager of *Al-Ahram* **Reda Hilal**, just offered me an exclusive preview copy of his new book *Deconstructing America*, which will be hitting the bookshops before you can say Jack Robinson. By the looks of it, dears, it will leave a mark, a large dent, even, I dare say. **Hilal** is deconstructing no less than the great ideas of democracy, the freedom so dear to the American heart, as well as their much-touted way of life. Something serious to mull over, and a change from *Days of Our Lives*.











Clerici; Nimr; Said and Ragaa; Vardan; *The Deconstruction of America*

♠ Apart from the bouts of *khamasin* which have covered our furniture with a virginal blanket of fine dust in the past few days, the month of March has also brought a fine crop of artistic events, considering the number of exhibitions, concerts and plays that I have been begged to grace with my presence.

Well dears, I am not one to resist manifestations of talent and, donning my surgical mask, I courageously sallied forth and danced in the wind on my way to the Arts Centre in Zamalek, where an exhibition of the works of the famous Italian artist **Fabrizio Clerici**, titled *Ritorno in Egitto* (or *Return to Egypt*, in basic English), organised by the Italian Cultural Centre and my dear friend, director of the centre **Carla Burri**, is taking place. You should really go, dust or no dust, and see for youselves what it is all about. I promise that you will come out of the exhibition with enough topics of conversation to last you a month at least.

♦ And if you have not yet been to **Salah Enani**'s *Open Buffet*, at the Arts Centre, now is your last chance, since you have exactly four days to sample... well, the leftovers, since I hear that, despite the hefty price tags, there was a conspicuous number of little red dots decorating **Salah**'s artistic creations on opening night.

♣ On a less nutritional note, the exhibition of the works of **Martin McInally**, *A Child Went Forth*, at the British Council will inform you of the changes which a few years in Egypt have brought to the style of this Scottish artist, who has borrowed verses from Walt Whitman to describe the way he feels now.

♥ Not a week goes by, it seems, when I do not visit Khan Al-Maghrabi. This week it was to attend the exhibition of **Rabab Nimr**, mysteriously titled Black and White. No, dears, I am not referring to the proverbial terriers, but if you are dying to know what I am talking about, why don't you go see for yourselves? You have till 3 April to discover which is which, and who is what, not to mention other questions worthy of investigation.

♦ All these exhibitions of plastic arts made me hunger for something less palpable and, when I heard that pianist **Vardan Mamikonian** was coming to Cairo for a concert at the Opera House, I was overjoyed. I called the Armenian General Benevolent Society and was told that I would have to wait till 2 April to hear him play my favourites from Ravel, Chopin, Arno Babadjanian and Liszt. In case you don't know, let me tell you that **Vardan** won first prize at the Yvonne Lefebvre Piano Competition in 1990 and first prize again at the Monte Carlo Piano Masters' Competition.

♣ Our own **Said Salem Hussein** has decided to take the plunge and ask **Ragaa** to be his lawfully wedded wife. From what I hear the ceremony was simple but joyful, with singing and dancing throughout the night. **Said**, who is back at work, seems to think that marrying **Ragaa** was the wisest decision he has made in a long time.

